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Jeanie Nairn's wee laddie

Maria M. Grant

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JEANIE NAIRN'S WEE LADDIE.

A Simple Story of the Old Town.

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BY

Maria M.

MISS GRANT,

AUTHOR OF

"MY HEART'S IN THE HIGHLANDS," "THE SUN-MAID," "ARTISTE,"
ETC. ETC.

LONDON:
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JEANIE NAIRN'S WEE LADDIE.

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A Simple Story of the Old Town.

CHAPTER I.

DONNIE'S HOME.

THE laddie sat opposite his porridge—and right opposite the laddie sat the Rev. Mr. Maclaren of the North Kirk.

There was something very pleasant about Mr. Maclaren, and so, evidently, the laddie thought; for his big brown eyes travelled slowly backwards and forwards, with wistful and wondering expression, from the smoking porridge to the kindly face. With comical solemnity he conveyed huge piled-up spoonfuls from the tempting bowl to his wide-open mouth, continuing the while his wondering observa-

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tion and his silent hearing of every word that was said.

The minister rested both hands upon his knees, and bent forward to eye the laddie, with critical gaze; and as he scanned the small figure, his grey twinkling eyes softened and glistened with gentle and amused expression—for the laddie was a funny little personage indeed! He sat perched on a low four-legged wooden stool, and the big porridge bowl stood on a chair in front of him. He had a rough fuzzly head of tangled light-brown curly hair; he had a round sunburnt face, and big wide-open eyes. He had little brown bare legs, very scantily covered by a ragged kilt, that had once been of Rob Roy tartan, but was now of a rusty and indescribable hue; and he had a little bit of a jacket, and a crumpled white shirt that, all loose and buttonless, fell back from the round sun-tanned neck.

He was a ragged little object,—but a bright, bonny, rosy-cheeked scrap of humanity all the same.

Jeanie stood close by his side, and it was her rough but ever-ready hand which had placed, a few minutes ago, the bowl of smoking porridge

and sweet milk, and the pewter spoon, on the chair before her laddie; and she stood now, at one moment watching him, and turning her eyes upwards the next, to reply with shy glances to the sober and emphatic remarks of their visitor.

Jeanie was about sixteen, a well-grown, sweet-faced girl, with firm figure, and active gesture, and quick eager glance; with brown wavy hair sweeping back from a frank and thoughtful brow, with clear hazel eyes, and with a tender, wistful, rather dreamy smile quivering and dancing over her lips, as she listened to the words of exhortation, and watched her laddie eat his frugal supper.

She was simply dressed, but there were picturesque and characteristic touches in her costume. Her linsey skirt was of a brown hue, like the tints of the fading autumn heather, and her short calico jacket, gathered in loosely at the waist, was of a soft shade of pink, and looked fresh and cool this hot summer evening, as she stood in the slanting rays of the sunset, listening respectfully, but with little reply and no assent, to Mr. Maclaren, who seemed to have a good deal to say. He had put his hat on the

ground, and had passed his large, soft, silk pocket-handkerchief over his round grizzled head and bland countenance many times already. And he had shaken his head, and had patted his knees vigorously with both hands to emphasise his remarks; and still Jeanie did not seem convinced by them, nor the laddie much perturbed over his porridge.

Kind-hearted Mr. Maclaren, however, was much perturbed; and once more, in the vain hope of making a final impression, he repeated—

“A thoosand times, Jeanie, lassie, I’ve told ye, o’er and o’er again,—ye should put the wee laddie on the pairish.”

Jeanie made no reply, only her colour deepened, and as the minister went on, her dewy hazel eyes wandered on to the laddie’s face, and meeting his big brown ones raised wonderingly to hers, she smiled,—the idea seemed an odd one to both of them!

“On the pairish,” repeated her worthy adviser; “a young lassie like you shouldna be takin’ burdens upon hersel’,—that’s not meant for the likes o’ her.”

“We must e’en tak’ what the Lord sends, sir,”

said Jeanie humbly, but with a strength of quiet determination in her voice.

"But the Lord has made the pairish, lassie,—is't for you to fly in the face o' powers and principalities, and to refuse a refuge for the orphan and the destitute that was prepared in the coorse o' Providence before you nor him neither was in the world at a'. Ech, lassie, but ye're awfu' prood and airish if ye scorn the Board and the pairish, when ye hae scarce a peck o' meal to mak' porridge to the bairn in the hoose. May ye no hae a fall, Jeanie, woman,—may ye no hae a fall."

"I canna pairt wi' the laddie now," said Jeanie; "and I'd rayther to want mysel', if ye please, Maister Maclaren, than to put Elsie's bairn upon the Board."

"Aweel, aweel, *may* ye get a blessin', the twa o' ye,—for ye're no but a pair o' bairns. Maybe ye'll tak thocht later, Jeanie, when ye're seekin' to mak' a hame to yersel'."

"I'll mak' aye a hame to Elsie's bairn, whatever," said Jeanie.

"Weel, may the Lord gie ye strength and prosperity to do it then; and may He replenish constant

the puckle meal and the cruse, for ye're a gude lassie, Jeanie, and ye hae a bonnie brave speerit o' yer ain. Aweel, aweel, there's no more that I can say. Gang yer ain gait,—and faith, it's no an ill gait! I weel believe ye'll hae the blessin' along wi' ye, and walk forward wi' the Clood and wi' the Fire. But," added Mr. Maclaren, suddenly under the influence of a fresh inspiration of remonstrance, "when ye come to the education, what wull ye do, lassie, then?"

"I'll put Donnie to the schule," said the girl soberly, as if fully and duly impressed with the responsibilities of her position.

"And ye'll tak' the schuling along wi' the meal and the claes oot o' yer ain airings at the Holme Mills? Ech, but, lassie, ye hae a wonderful courage! Are ye no frightened when ye think o' the wolf at the door?"

"There'll be the Shepherd there to meet him, sir," murmured Jeanie, with a deep blush and a droop of her moistening eyes. "Ech, Maister Maclaren, dinna ye think that He'll mind on us? Ech, sir—na, na—I canna be afraid."

"He'll mind on ye, and that's sure," said the

worthy minister, with a glisten in his grey, kindly eye. "Your trust fair rebukes me, lassie ; I'll no say anither word to wear it doon. May ye hae the blessin', Jeanie, o' them that taks thocht for the lambs o' the fold, and o' them that gives heartily to the little ones—not a cup of cold water only, but all the best and the richest o' what is theirs. Ye'll get the blessin', lassie,—there's no fears o' that. I'll leave ye safely in the Shepherd's hands. May He himself gie ye strength and plenty, and when ye want a freend or a coonsel—in the education, whatever—maybe He'll direct ye the length o' Telford Street to me. Ye'll no find me wantin'. I'll do all in my power, lassie, to be a freend to the laddie, and to yersel'."

"Thank ye kindly, sir," said Jeanie, with a curtsy, as the minister rose and took up his hat with his last words, and she stood back to make way for his portly presence to cross the little room, turning at the same time to open the low latched door.

"Donnie, will ye rise and mak yer boo, like a douce laddie, to the minister?"

"Na, na, never ye mind, my wee man, get ye through wi' the porridge."

Donnie put down his spoon and looked up, with wide beautiful gaze, into the genial face, closing his mouth tight at the same time over an ample charge of porridge. Mr. Maclaren patted the curly head.

"Eh, but it's a bonnie bairn, wi' the nut-brown cheeks and wild glance in the dark gipsy eye. Eh, wull ye be a gude laddie, noo?"

"He's a very gude laddie. He's coming on beautiful wi' the Catechism; he came to the 'Reasons annexed to the Third Commandment,' sir, the very nicht afore his mither died."

"Eh, man, but that's weel! Did ye get him through the 'Election' and 'all the Works o' Creation and Providence' already?"

"Ay, ay, sir; he's wonderful at the up-tak. I'm thinkin maybe he'll be a scholar, Maister Maclaren; and it's amazin', for I canna right mind a gude few o' the questions mysel'."

"Dearie me, he'll be a clever laddie. Weel, that's gude, whatever. Keep him till't, lassie, keep him till't; and when ye get him past the 'Tenth Commandment,' I'll step in an evening, and put him through them mysel'."

"Thank ye kindly, sir," said Jeanie once more, as she held the door open and the worthy minister passed out. "Gude nicht to ye, sir, and thank ye kindly."

"Gude nicht, my gude lassie, and blessin's on ye. And when ye're speerin' for coonsel or troubled for the education, bring the wee laddie to me."

Out from the low doorway under the heavy projecting thatch passed Mr. Maclaren on to the Little Green, and across it he went to the river's bank, along which a broad road led him downwards towards the town.

The worthy man walked with slow footsteps and downcast glance. A tender smile lit up his rugged countenance with soft expression—as a ray of sunshine on a bit of green moss, nestling in the crevice of a stern grey rock, glistens and smiles, sometimes with a dewy and tender beauty, which makes the whole rough boulder fair. It was the memory of Jeanie that made the old rugged-faced man smile so gently—of that frail solitary flower in the big wilderness of his scattered parish. So she had been only yesterday, it seemed to him, weak and wind-shaken, clinging round stouter and older oaks for protection

and help. The thought of her having strengthened to-day into a firm-stemmed, self-reliant, proud, young plant, with leaves branching forth to yield shelter and covering for another—still weaker and more lonely than herself,—for this wee brown-faced ragged laddie, who had been drifted by the reckless sweep of his young life-storm into the safe, though humble, haven of Jeanie's home.



CHAPTER II.

THE MILL GIRLS.

THAT little home was ringing with the glad echoes of the laddie's bold young voice before the minister had gone many paces on his way; and Jeanie's soft "whisht, whisht" was murmured many times before Donnie had satisfactorily worked through the porridge.

Donnie's tongue was not often prone to such lengthened silence, and Mr. Maclaren's imposing presence once removed from over against him, it burst immediately all its limits of abashed discretion, and out-poured, for Jeanie's ears and ready sympathy, many confidences quaint and strange. And Jeanie fetched herself another four-legged wooden stool, and set it down before the fire, near the chair which formed the laddie's table. And she filled a small brown teapot

from the steaming kettle that swung above the peats, and then, putting it among the smouldering ashes to "mask awhile," she sat down, rested her comely well-shapen arms upon her knees, and turned round to look straight at her laddie, and to smile in reply to his eager words.

"Whisht, whisht, Donnie; eat yer supper, ma man, and gang awa' till yer bed; it's time ye war asleep the now."

And the laddie ate in silence for a moment, and she watched him with softened and wistful gaze.

Six months ago, one winter evening, the laddie had taken his place—for the first time—before a teeming porridge bowl at that little fireside.

It was a boisterous night. Jeanie had come home "wat and weary" from the mills. She had just lit up a cheery blaze on the hearthstone, and had swung her kettle on the big iron hook. She had cast off the damp tartan plaid that had covered her shoulders in the long hurried trudge down the river-side from the factory. She had drawn her wooden stool to the ingle-neuk, and had sat down to rest her young tired frame. And the fire had blazed up with a cheery

smile to her ; and the red flames lighted and warmed the dusky colouring of her little mud-floored room. It looked a cosy wee place on that winter evening, —cosy and tidy and bright, though very humble indeed. The peat firelight had glowed with such a warm contrast to the chill and the storm beyond the window. The blue plates and cups and saucers, set out upon the shelves of the wooden dresser, had glittered in the flame ; and the bits of humble furniture (tidy and plain as they all were) glistened also in its lively light,—for Jeanie was wont to polish them, of a Saturday, until the common deal shone like rose-wood or mahogany, and the broad-seated, high-winged chair, beside the wide black chimney, might really have served her, at an emergency, as a “keek-in'-glass.”

A brown, dusky room, warm and fire-lit, was Jeanie's little home ; and as she sat there before the blazing peats, the vision of her, with fair bending head, and glowing cheeks, and comely arms clad in calico working-jacket folded upon her knees, gladdened the eyes of another—a young, weary-faced, travel-stained woman, who stood close by the small

window, and gazed in upon Jeanie as if fascinated by the picture of cosy warmth and restful peace of that little mud-floored home.

It was only for a few minutes, however, that the tired wanderer had paused to gaze. A few minutes and she opened the low door. An instant more and she was greeted with a welcome as warm as the bright peat glow — and seated in the big chair by the chimney-corner, while Jeanie's kindly fingers undid the fastenings of her storm-drenched cloak.

"Ech! Elsie, woman! at lang and at length hae ye come back to yer ain?"

Few were the words, but full of language was the action with which Jeanie welcomed her long-lost cousin home.

The laddie was asleep on his mother's shoulder. The tired arms had borne him, close-covered in the poor mantle, many a long mile; and he awoke to find himself on Jeanie's knee, before the great fire, with a warm glow creeping pleasantly over his chubby limbs, and a big bowl of porridge ready on the chair beside him.

She put him on to the little stool after a moment —after one look into his beautiful, brown, opening eyes, and one kiss on the baby lips that parted to smile to her. She had set him there, and put his porridge in front of him, and had turned to attend to his weary mother ; and the laddie had settled to his supper. In a quiet, cosmopolitan, philosophic way, he had proceeded to eat, his big eyes roaming with a wondering gaze over the snug little room the while.

And there, every evening since that first winter night, he had sat, and ruminated, and consumed his porridge, and warmed his small brown legs at the bright flame, while Jeanie sat and gazed at him, with folded arms upon her knees, and with that amused and tender expression in her soft hazel eyes.

Elsie Raffe and Jeanie Nairn were cousins — “sisters’ bairns,” as they were called on the Little Green.

The mothers came from the south, and had come together, a good many years ago, when the Holme Mills had been first set whirling, and when their

owners had fetched skilled hands from a distance to start the works. The two sisters had married, and had never gone back to their own country, but had settled with their Highland husbands there in Inverness. They had worked away through years of industrious life, living always in the little home nooks at the Green corner, and trudging up the river-side to their daily toil. Good women—hard-working and respected—though strangers in the town.

They were a tidy little colony through Elsie Fraser and Jeanie Nairn's first childish days; and a happy, busy, little colony, until trouble came, one hard winter, among them, and their numbers began suddenly to diminish. A fatal epidemic that broke out one year, and lurked for many shadowy months among the low damp places along the river-side, got in among the mill hands, and made an orphan of Elsie Fraser in a few short weeks. She was older by several years than Jeanie Nairn, and by the time her father and mother were taken from her she was ready to fill a post at the mill. And she went to work—a hearty, lively, strong-willed girl, capable at all points to do well at her work, and fully capable (in her own

opinion, at least) to do successfully for herself. She made her home with Jeanie's mother, and the two girls became as sisters—Jeanie loving her cousin with the faithful and eager devotion which a young deep-hearted creature is ever ready to lavish on one older or more brilliant than herself.

It was a wild enough life these mill girls led in those times, trudging backward and forward, at five in the morning, and at six at night, nearly three miles up and down by the river-side, with no one to care much, or to think anything about them, from the hour that the mill door was closed behind them, until it opened to re-admit them next morning again. They were a wild enough lot indeed; and many a time the ring of their voices, and the rush of their hasty feet, as they trooped up and down the road in a noisy gang together, reached the ears of the quiet and decent dwellers on Ness Bank, of an early morning or a dark afternoon, causing them to shake their heads and frown disapproval, as the mill girls trooped heedlessly by. There was many a worthy toiling body among them, truly (such as the sisters, the mothers of both Elsie and Jeanie, had been for many

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a year), but as a rule they were a rough lot, and Elsie Fraser joined in with the wildest. She worked at the mill for two restless years, often chafing at the monotony of her life, often rebelling against the burden of her daily toil. Then, just as Jeanie was growing up to take her place at the wool-loom by her side, Elsie broke away from them all, picked up an acquaintance with a band of gipsy rovers who came one autumn, wandering down the loch's woody sides, and in defiance of her people, against every advice or will but her own, she married a tall black-eyed young fellow from the midst of them, packed her scanty possessions, and went off with the camp, when they struck their brown tents in the Darroch, and disappeared for the falling winter towards the south.

Jeanie was alone soon after that, for one by one her own parents, decent people, passed quietly away. And there she was left, in the little old mud-floored cottage, to keep herself, and to work her own humble toilsome way through life—with none to rule her, and none to cheer the solitude of her home.

She worked away brave and steadfast, with a tidy

hearth, and an honest house ; “keeping herself to herself,” as her mother’s phrase had been, in a quiet and canty way, that her mother had had before her ; and by which she travelled along the rough pathways of her mill life, with heart pure and bright within, and head held high. It was not the “pride that needs a fall,” though Mr. Maclaren did shake his head kindly over it—this pride of heart and spirit that carried Jeanie along. It was quite another kind of pride, for which we seem to need another word ; for it was blended with the gentlest diffidence, and the tenderest humility as regarded herself. Only it encircled her around with a kind of light and force of its own ;—a light in which evil seemed to become instantly unmasked and apparent, and to start back as if convicted, from her presence ; and a force which, while absolutely unaggressive, was as absolutely unassailable in its resistive strength.

“She’s a prood lass, Jeanie Nairn,” said many of her rough comrades, with a significant look, as if this pride was something they would not care about defying on their own account.

“But, eh, she’s a douce bonnie bit lassie,” said many

another one (weak and weary ones, perhaps), to whom only the soft side of her strong gentle nature had ever stood revealed; for whom she had done many a task, lit many a fire, and finished many a bit of mill-work that was "behind" and too hard a strain for the failing or sickly fingers to accomplish.

"As great a contrast to what her cousin Elsie had been, as well could be,"—so everybody in the mill declared Jeanie, when she came among them to take her patient and daily task. A contrast, and yet deeply and faithfully attached to Elsie, on whose actions or history she would never hear an evil word.

Always devoted, always faithful she remained to the memory of her brilliant cousin, and of her own young days, until that wintry evening when, after four years of silence and neglect, Elsie came across her threshold once more. Weary and way-worn—"fair tired out," as she said, "with the dule o' life"—she came to put her wee boy down by Jeanie's chimney-corner, safe in its warmth and welcome, sure of his supper and his bit of bed, happy in the smile of a new young "bonnie mither"—before she turned herself to rest and to die.

Elsie had had a hard life of it through those gipsying years. Will Raffe had not made her the best of husbands; and the rough riot of the tinkering existence, through which he dragged her, had been more than her young courage or frame could bear. Elsie was wasted with a long illness when she had turned to seek her old home and to bring her boy to Jeanie. She could not bear to follow the vagrant fortunes of the camp any longer, nor could she at all endure the thought—now old scenes and old teachings came crowding back upon her—the thought that Donnie would be nurtured, when she came to leave him, in the tainted atmosphere of a vagrant's life.

“‘E'en brings a' hame,' lassie,” she said, as she sank by Jeanie's fire. And Jeanie saw it was near the “e'en”—passed the “gloamin'” indeed. It almost seemed to her that the night was ready to fall.

And it fell. That summer month, when Mr. Mac-laren had sat in the sun-rays, and exhorted Jeanie (in words of prudence and worldly-forethought, at least), she and the laddie had been left in the cottage alone.

For the Raffes' gipsy camp was pitched far away—where? Nobody, as far as Jeanie knew, could tell! And bright-eyed Elsie (the bonniest girl of the Holme Mill troop this many a year) was laid in the old Chapel-yard at the foot of Church Street, in a quiet corner amongst her father's people, and by her mother's side. Her weary wanderings were over, and her wilful and passionate eagerness at rest.

“‘E'en brings a' hame,’” as she had murmured; and it was well for her at last, on all sides—so the kindly neighbours said.

“She was gathered amongst her ain again, and her wee laddie was safe, and sure to be weel keepit by Jeanie's peat fireside.”



CHAPTER III.

GIPSYING ON THE GREEN.

DONNIE RAFFE led a very happy life in the house on the Little Green, and there was a sort of gipsy element in its conditions which exactly suited certain inherent tendencies which very soon appeared.

He was a "gude, douce laddie," as Jeanie had said of him—gentle and obedient to her word, winsome and cheerful, and working his way immediately into the hearts of all the kindly "neeburs." Making a friend of every old washerwoman and fishwife on the Green, and earning for himself, by little more than a flash from his brown gipsy eyes, or a smile from his bonnie red lips, a welcome in every chimney-corner in the place, and many a cosy chance bit of dinner besides.

The "bairnie's portion" was smoking on most of

the humble boards in the thatched cottages all around them by one o'clock. At that hour Jeanie was far away at the factory, and Donnie, by dire necessity, left to look after himself. And sitting at the foot of one of the tall white posts on which the women stretched their drying-lines, or curled up against the wall under the broad thatch of the houses, he was wont to betake him with perfect contentment, at this hour, to a steady munch, munch, through the huge pieces of oat-bread and cold potatoes with which Jeanie had filled his jacket pockets before she left him in the morning.

Many a day, however, the low thatched doorway would open of some neighbouring cottage—a rough kindly voice call out to him, and a bowl of barley broth, or a hot fried herring, be held out to induce him to come in, and to take his place amongst the crowd of curly heads about the table. They had not much to spare, these good people, but they had ever a warm welcome to give with it. And freely would Donnie's plate or bowl be filled to overflowing, as the mother murmured—

“Aweel, aweel, bless his brown bonnie face!

The bairns 'll no want, whatever, for the bit or the sup they gie to Jeanie's wee laddie."

It was the full beautiful summer-time when Jeanie and her boy, in defiance of Mr. Maclaren's prudent remonstrance, began their life alone together; and the daily habits of that bright summer were carried on into several happy childish years.

Before five in the morning, Jeanie would invariably rise and would light the bit of bright peat fire,—and Donnie was always awake and stirring before her.

The first chirp of the swallows under the heavy thatch seemed to rouse him to life and energy in those summer days. The first ray of the rising sunshine slanting through the little thick pane of glass in his bit of window, would reveal him burrowing under his pillow, among his tumbled bedclothes, for some treasure concealed carefully the night before. The first movement from Jeanie, and her first glance in his direction, would find him struggling in helpless perplexity into his small red kilt. And by the time she had lit the fire, and boiled his por-

ridge, and "made ready," as she said, to give him his breakfast, and to comb his rough locks into a tidy state before she left him for the day, he was whisking round her and jumping about the room, and talking and chirping to himself and to her, like a small lively sparrow who had just popped his head up from under his soft downy wing, and who having said good-bye to rest and slumber with the break of the morning and the flush of the rising sun, is ready to chirp and dance through the live-long day, from twig to twig, from thatch to thatch, from tree to tree.

And so would Donnie, like a bright little bird, pass his roving day. Out upon the Green first, where the last glimpse of Jeanie was to be caught, as, wrapped in her tartan plaid, she ran round the corner by Ness House, and away towards the bridge, and across it—trudging, with her group of fellow-workers, through the early dawn-light up the other side.

At this point he could watch her again, as he curled upon the sloping bank above the rushing river, among the washerwomen collecting for their

morning toil. Watch her, as she sped on—and passed away out of his sight along the Ladies' Walk higher up the stream. He could pick her out from among all the girls to the last moment that his eyes could follow her, and "that's ma Jeanie!" he would exclaim triumphantly to the nearest listener, as he pointed out the tartan plaid disappearing in the distance fast beyond his view. Then Donnie had the day on his hands!

His diversions were various—his friends were many—and his foes were few.

The Little Green was chiefly inhabited in those days by washerwomen and fishwives. Hide-and-seek and "catch who catch can" round the tall posts of the drying green were favourite diversions; and the posts were always handy, and the ropes generally covered with a vast display of waving raiment of every sort and kind. These made capital veils and screens to hide behind and to dodge round; the excitement of which pursuit being in noways lessened by the chance of charging right against a stout washerwoman, busy spreading linen behind a row of sheets; and of being caught by her, by the skirts

of a kilt or the tail of a ragged jacket, and having the ears soundly boxed by her stalwart hand.

Donnie did not mind this danger one bit, for the process seldom reached the boxing point with him. He was often caught, but one restive shake of his fair touzled head, one glance of his bright eyes, and a single deprecating smile (as he wriggled in the firm grasp), and the hold always relaxed upon him. The rough kind hand, to which "skelping" and slapping was often more a matter of language and terrific threat than of action, would be laid on the curly head instead of applied to the ears; and—

"Is't you, Donnie? Eh, ye randy, d'ye want yer skelps? Na? Wull ye rin awa' wi' ye, then? Ye rascally boys, ye'll be pittin' yer feet thro' Mistruss Mactavish's sheets before ye've done wi' yer mischief. And, bless me, there's Jocky Fraser wi' his very head in the tail o' Provost Dillan's shirt. I'll be at ye, ye scoundrels; wull ye be aff?"

A general flight would follow at this point, and Donnie escape safely under the cover of diverted wrath. And away he would go, showing his small heels fast enough, whisking through the white posts,

and the waving linen, while many a kindly word went after him, as he sped along.

“Eh, but that laddie o’ Jeanie’s has a flash o’ the sun in his ee!”

Donnie preferred the fishwives to the washer-women; they had more time on their hands at his disposal; they were more sociable and communicative; and besides, fish—dead or alive—were his most especial interest and delight.

There was a queer tall old body, whose bending shoulders had carried many a creel, whom he loved, spite her grimy face and unsavoury occupation, indeed next to Jeanie herself. And many a fine morning he would trot down the lower river banks holding on to big “Mairac’s” skirt—away down to the fish-market by the sea, where he would watch her buy her fish, and help her to count and clean them—getting a bundle of shining herring or silvery-breasted haddocks as his share of the booty, to carry back for Jeanie’s supper, when she came home tired and hungry from the mill.

All these rough hard-wrought women were his friends! And so was the baker round in Tomna-

hurich Street, whom he would watch of a morning filling his basket and poising it on his head, and go off on his rounds to supply genteel breakfasts with "scones" and white dusty "baps" in those pretty villas up the river-side. Donnie often walked a mile with the baker—keeping him company, and talking to him in a funny canty way he had. And he walked for the pleasure of it, and because he liked his friend, and not at all for the sake of the "bap" which unfailingly found its way into his own pocket, but which he often forgot to eat for hours afterwards, amid the varied excitements of his roving day.

The Little Green has been swept away of late years, but in Donnie's time it was a quaint, picturesque nook,—lying back just a little from the river, in whose deep rushing waters the women plunged their linen, wringing it out between them, and washing it white and snowy in a very peculiar way of their own.

I have never seen it in any other country, but it was a part of the toils of their profession in which Donnie, or any other little "rascal" on the Green, was always ready to assist, for—it was capital fun ! "

At a certain stage of the mysterious ceremony, by which piles of clothing, soiled and crumpled, became fragrant basketsful of snowy hue,—at a certain stage the women of the Green stripped off shoes and stockings, rolled up their petticoats very considerably above the knee—and plunging the clothes into the running water—danced and jumped upon them, until all were stamped clean by vigorous action and washed white by the stream. A capital method, and very characteristic — affording great diversion to Donnie when he was allowed to join!

Up would curl the little kilt at a moment's notice, and into the water he was ever ready to spring; and stamp would go the little bare feet and brown chubby knees until "Peg" or "Jessac," calling a halt, declared the washing accomplished by his efficient aid.

In fact, Donnie half lived in the river.

It was in itself so beautiful, and, like a living friend, it was to him always alluring, and its sole companionship nearly always enough.

That great, broad, noble stream on which the town lay, that strong and indomitable river, which came flowing from the lochs up westwards, and went rush-

ing to the broad blue sea; across which bridges spanned, and round which the buildings clustered, small and great, and old and new; on whose wide glistening bosom the church steeples, and the castle towers, and the prison walls from up the castle brae, threw deep reflections in the sunset of the evening or in the dewy light of the summer dawn.

The grand river ! rushing under the drooping island woods, and between the verdant banks, where houses and flowery gardens, nestling among golden corn-fields, stood side by side, and where meadows, gemmed with daisies, stretched away over the wide fair plains of the fertile valley to the foot of the range of encircling hills.



CHAPTER IV.

THE BLACK SOLDIER.

BUT if stamping in the river, amid the soap bubbles and piles of washerwomen's linen, was in those days a favourite amusement with Donnie, fishing in the river was a most especial delight.

But in pursuit of the noble sport of fishing, he encountered not only friends but foes.

His friends were good-natured boys living in the pretty houses up the river-bank, who gave him a fish-hook now and again, or a bit of broken line, or a bent "scobie," as they all call their hazelwood rods—kindly boys, who spent their own happiest holidays knee-deep in the running river—and who took a ready liking, along with humbler friends, to Donnie's brown eyes and sunburnt gipsy face. They let him carry their baskets sometimes, or disentangle their lines, or climb an overhanging tree and unfasten a

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hook from out its branches; or, best of all, hold a rod and keep it steady, while they went in for an hour to lessons or to lunch, from which last they would often emerge with a fat portion for Donnie in a fishing-basket, or a school-satchel meant for another use. Friends these, much beloved and long remembered, even when they had scattered far and wide.

His chief foe was the "Black Soldier," who, having helped to squash Napoleon at "Quarter-Brass," as he called it, kept his hand in now, ready for any future emergency in which his country might require his service, by waging war against every small boy in the town. He was the river-bailiff, or the "water-bailie" as he was really called, and small fishing-boys were his mortal foes.

He pounced upon them from behind trees and round unlooked-for corners. He waved his stout stick, he roared with stentorian lungs; he shook his fist, he gave chase vigorously, while away down the river-side, along the green banks, and over the grey dappled stones, went the affrighted urchins, whisking along with heels in the air and rods upon their shoulders, and never halting till they felt sure

that the Black Soldier must have run until stopped by a twinge of the old leg-wound of "Quarter-Brass," and must be effectually pumped out of breath.

Donnie dreamt of the Black Soldier, and feared him as he feared nothing else in mortal or human form.

And yet he was a good-natured old fellow in the main; for the only time he ever really caught Donnie, he behaved exactly like everybody else. He smiled back into the brown bright eyes; he burst into a laugh at the scared expression of the little sun-tanned face, and he relaxed his hold.

"Ha, ye little rascal," he said, "rin awa' wi' ye, and no let me catch ye again, or, as sure as deeth, I'll tak' ye up before the Provost, and he'll order ye to be flogged at the gun's end through the Merkinch, ye randy—like the Ginerall did the scoondrals that took the booty after 'Quarter-Brass!' Rin awa', and tak' the scobie along wi' ye, to poke the peat-fire."

And so the "water-bailie" winked like other people at Donnie's misdemeanours; for, in truth, over "a' the toon," and up and down along the river, it seemed through these bright young years of his that "Jeanie Nairn's wee laddie," indeed, was *everybody's bairn*.

So he fished morning, noon, and eve. He was never tired of fishing; water-bailies, and even threatened interviews with that terrible man the Provost, never prevailing to make him cease.

And many and many a summer's evening, as Jeanie, trudging homewards from her day's weary work, came down along the Ladies' Walk, to where the stone margin was wider, and the river near the edges not so deep, she would catch sight of her laddie standing up to his knees in the water, his bright uncovered head glistening in the evening light, his bit of red kilt pinned up about his waist, his bending scobie poised high as he cast his line, and held it firm and steady, while the fly-hook danced away upon the rippling stream, he waiting in patience for such confiding infant trouts or shining garvy as might swim in his direction and rise to his bait.

It was a fascinating sport, and Donnie was happy as a little king in those soft summer evenings, when the river was shadowy, the sun setting in the western sky, the reflections deep and still upon the bends of the flowing water, and the wee fishes jumping like fleas upon its surface all around.

He would not observe Jeanie coming down the bank at those times—so complete was his absorption—until she would stop and call—

“Donnally! come awa’, ma laddie; it’s time ye was at hame and had yer supper. Come awa’, come awa’.”

And then he would wade out to her, eager to exhibit the trophies of his sport—the handfuls of little glistening silvery fish with which his pockets were filled, and which would make a fine show at their supper to-night, when Jeanie had cleaned and boiled them, and served them for him in lieu of porridge, with a good thick bannock of oatcake.

Out they would all come, for her edification, tumbling from his pockets into her lap; and Jeanie, with many exclamations of surprise and admiration, renewed every evening and never losing their freshness or charm, would gather up the fish in a handkerchief, saying—

“My word, but it’s a clever laddie! Did anybody ever see sich a sicht as thus? Dearie me, thus *is* a fishing! Come awa’, come awa’, till we get hame and mak’ the supper. What a fine dish o’ troots we’ll hae the nicht!”

And away they would go, down the river-side; Donnie trotting along with his rod on one shoulder, and holding tight by Jeanie with the other small brown hand; his little wet bare feet pattering over the stones and gravel, dodging round and picking out the smooth places, and shrinking up now and again as his toes struck a flint or a sharp angle, or encountered a lurking piece of crackling thorn. On they went, he chattering incessantly the whole time, telling her all the adventures of the day, receiving answers always sympathetic, although short and perhaps a little monotonous in their repetition.

"Eh, my word!" came invariably, as he told triumphantly of the capture of his biggest fish.

And "Dearie me, whatna peety, whatna peety!" as invariably—when his tale was of an enormous, seemingly whale-like creature, who had managed to escape his hook.

Donnie saw wonders in the deep river in those early days; and a baby trout of humble proportions had a way of looking huge as a salmon amid the dancing reflections of the current, as it turned its back on him and skimmed cleverly away.

On they went, the two together; and even on he chattered, until, perhaps, they reached Ness Bank, when Donnie's voice seeming to flag, and his steps to falter, and his hold on Jeanie's gown to cling heavier and more close, she would glance down upon him, and realising the truth at once, would catch up the laddie into her strong young arms, and carry him vigorously along, her head held straight, and her step firm and rapid, while he fell instantly sound asleep, his mop of touzled fair curls dropping on to her shoulder, one arm clinging safely round her, and the other hanging over her back.

Jeanie would possess herself of the scobie, and on she would trudge till they reached the mud-floored cottage at the corner of the Green, where she would drop him into the big chair at the chimney-corner with a cheery laugh; and Donnie would rub his eyes, stretch every limb of his small tired body, and be wide-awake again for a few minutes to eat his supper.

CHAPTER V.

GONE BYE.

SUCH, all the summer through, was, at every evening sunset, their coming home.

Besides his fishing, and the foes and friends it made for him, Donnie had in those years few other strong tastes or sentiments in life.

Of his strongest feelings, such as his love of Jeanie—the only mother of whom he remembered much—he was, like most children, quite unconscious. It was there—a fact too absolutely existing, too free from any influence or change, to challenge consciousness or realisation in his heart. It was there a portion—perhaps the most real portion—of himself, a feeling which would exist still, if every other thing in and about him were filtered away. But it was too spontaneous for question or recognition.

He was unconscious of it; all his expressions of feeling, all the sweet winsome ways in which he poured out his devotion to her, were as natural and simply spontaneous as the habits and gestures, and light graceful movements, of a wild young mountain roe.

But of one or two other feelings he was very conscious indeed, and long afterwards he could remember them! One was his awe of the Provost, of the Board of civic magnates, and of all the paraphernalia and majesty with which the judges came to Inverness at stated periods, and swept in stern and imposing procession to the court upon the Castle Hill.

They shared at once his awe and admiration, with the triumphal car of the Queen of Lions in the procession of Wombwell's Menagerie, which, along with the pipers who played at the games, and all the gay county gentry who attended them, generally appeared in Inverness, along with the judges and the court solemnities, all somewhere much about the same time.

Donnie had heard of Queen Victoria—from tale and rumour wafted to the river-side—and he thought

that she must be like the Queen of Lions—perhaps nearly as grand and great !

When he went to kirk for the first time, he noticed at once, with his quick little ears and wits, that the minister prayed for Queen Victoria, along with his other majestic friends the magistrates, and “all in authority and rule.” He listened eagerly at this point with full assent and approval, but was much dismayed, and a little shocked too, that Mr. Maclaren did not pray for the Queen of Lions as well.

And he knew all about Queen Victoria's court—for had he not gone in, half-price for three half-pence, and seen that grand reception of the Lion Queen? The court of Windsor (of which Jeanie tried to give him a well-founded view) must be just like that, he thought. And as for the Court of Session, that great and awful assembly collected within the castle walls, it was all one and the same thing as the Judgment-day to his mind—the two being inextricably entangled together in a oneness of impression which it took years, and indeed experience, to dissolve.

He had an awe of all these things, and beyond this

he had an admiration for one or two other things as well.

First and foremost, for the town's officers, in their Sunday and festive attire. It was a pretty, picturesque, quaint, old-day dress—of scarlet swallow-tailed coats, great cocked hats, and plush breeches of a rich dark blue. In it these worthy men were wont to attire themselves, and with long halberds on their shoulders, walk in fine procession in a row in front of the Provost and the board of bailies to the old High Kirk on Sundays, or to other solemn assembly where the civic dignitaries were bound officially to appear.

Donnie admired these brave gentlemen above all things, and he was personally much attached to one or two of them as well; for though he feared horribly the Black Soldier in those days, the town's officers or the city police never filled him with dismay.

They were such kindly, good-natured men, with such a soft canty way with them, as they strode about and stood at street corners on ordinary days, clad in their long blue greatcoats, and wearing their old-fashioned hats,—easy-going personages, with a high

sense of the public right to be "let alone," and of the general and probable innocence of youthful enterprise and curiosity. Even their bark and growl was not terrific ; and in those sunny childish days of Donnie's they were never known to bite.

If he and a couple of urchins like him scrambled up a lamp-post to see a smart wedding emerge from the little episcopal chapel of St. John's, or got upon the dyke's top to gaze longingly over the enclosure upon the games, old Sandy Davidson the officer would shake his head and call, "Come doon oot o' that, ye rascals," as he passed along ; but his assaults on the liberty and enjoyment of the youthful subject seldom went beyond this, and without dreaming of enforcing his orders he usually went his way.

Donnie was not one bit afraid of "auld Sandy," and on high days and Sundays he admired him as the greatest of men.

For it was an eventful point in his early memories, when Jeanie at last had saved up enough to buy him a pair of clump-soled brogues, had finished knitting him his first pair of ribbed wool stockings,

and had "got the bairn dacent," as she said, to take him to the kirk.

It was to the Great High Kirk they went,—for though Mr. Maclaren was Jeanie's particular minister, her adviser, and her best friend, she went often to the High Kirk ; for Jeanie's mother being from the South, the girl had got but little Gaelic, and Mr. Maclaren preached always in that weird ancient tongue at "one end o' the day." So that "end" Jeanie went across the river to the other side.

She had no seats in a pew in the High Kirk ; such a luxury was beyond the habit and ambition "o' the likes o' her." But she had a "freend," a canty wee body in a white mutch and long blue cloak and linsey gown, who opened and shut the pew-doors, and kept the cushions dusted and tidy, and took reverential charge of the kirk and its contents on week-days. A capital good friend in such a place was she !

She had a great opinion, this wee canty body, of that "douce and dacent lassie, Jeanie Nairn." And every Sunday morning or evening, when Mr. Maclaren had the Gaelic at the North Kirk, she made room on her own low bench, under the window be-

side the vestry-door, for Jeanie to sit with her; and there she made the wee laddie welcome to a cosy corner, on the first day he wore brogues and stockings, and was brought to kirk.

Eh! it was a thrilling time! For whom should he see—just as the doctor's big books were being brought from out the vestry and carried reverently upstairs to the pulpit-desk (by a quiet and sober functionary, whom Donnie knew already in a secular walk of life),—just as this event caught his eager attention, whom should he see entering hastily, and flinging open the door of a wide long pew just opposite the pulpit, in the front of the gallery right above his head, but his friend “auld Sandy” in his gorgeous scarlet attire.

There he was, heralding the whole Board of bailies, and the very Provost himself,—ushering them into the wide pew, and then withdrawing, and appearing in an instant above their heads behind. On the red cushion in front of him, each bailie, after bowing to his fellows and before taking his seat, deposited with much dignity his beaver hat, and then Sandy continued his part! Forth came

his stalwart scarlet arm and his grey head over the shoulder of each imposing magnate, and away as if by magic he whisked each hat. And Donnie, opening wide his eyes, learnt something new (as he sat staring and wondering) of the grandeur and the majesty of the State.

After this came many Sabbaths in which Donnie was seldom absent from his place. It was wonderful the long "diets," as the services were there called, that the little chap sat soberly through,—it was wonderful the interest the whole quiet imposing scene had for his young scrutinising eyes, and how it all filled and satisfied his imagination.

I have heard it remarked, and I have felt it to be true, that there is no national ceremonial in our country anything like so imposing as the opening of the Houses of Parliament by the Queen. It is the finest of all our ceremonies of State, and it is distinguished by its simplicity, by its quietness, by the absence of all unnecessary pageantry, of superfluous gesture or action, or of *borrowed* force of effect of any kind. The majesty of the event, with the Presence it implies, and the import of the object

of their being gathered together, is in itself sufficient to the complete effectiveness of the Assemblage. It requires nothing more. For no other State pageantry conveys so forcibly the sobriety, the solidity, and the reality of our nation's grandeur and strength.

Donnie had never seen this, so he could draw no such parallel; but the simple grandeur and dignity of that kirk service reached him with something of the same effect.

The swelling voice of the multitude, as "All people that on earth do dwell" rose like a wave of the ocean that first morning, never lost the power to make his heart thrill and beat.

The old sweet stories, read from the large wide-flapped volume on the velvet pulpit cushion—given with simple explanation, full of poetry and force—never failed to reach his interest and his eager feelings, nor to fill his mind with fair pictures and with deep quickening truth.

And if now and again, during the seventy minutes of the grand vigorous sermon, he fell asleep against Jeanie's shoulder, it was because the powerful elo-

quence soared sometimes above his head, and because the sun was beating warm against the window, and the kirk was hot and full. No one much blamed the wee laddie for that indeed ! He was awake and alert as ever again when the last prayer called them all to their feet, and his ears pricked up and opened wide to hear his friends the bailies and the Provost (standing up there so grand), and the Queen herself (riding in triumphal lion-cars, perhaps, far away at Windsor), prayed for by name and in succession, with a personal point and application which never failed to keep Donnie's listening interest alive.

Sunday was indeed through these times Jeanie's happiest day—above all, after the stockings were ready, and the brogues were bought, and the laddie went regularly to the kirk along with her. For on Sunday she had him the whole sweet day to herself.

There was no weary trudge to the mill on that morning, no hurrying over a five o'clock breakfast, no longing to return to the laddie at the close of the hard-working day — but a quiet

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cheery morning together as the sun rose; a great washing and polishing of Donnie's brown ruddy cheeks; a "real breakfast"—not of hastily stirred porridge, but of tea and of baker's loaf, and butter fresh yestereven from the churn, brought home by Jeanie as she came down the river after her Saturday's short work, and stopped to pay a visit to her friend Mrs. Bethune at the Holme Farm.

Then there was the kirk, and the bit of dinner—fish and roast potatoes, or a pot of broth; and then a ramble through all the bright afternoons, on which Jeanie's discretion would restrain her wisely from taking her laddie in these early years once again to the church.

A long ramble up the river-side to sit on the "General's Well," to gather flowers and long-tufted "sodgers" on the river's bank; and round by the Bught, where the hum of the meal-mill was still on the Sabbath, and the voices of children mingled in the soft air instead.

Or away up the canal banks, perhaps, where treasures of wild beauty grew: dogroses in the summer, heather and green branching "bracken"

when August came, and where rowan berries and brambles and the little purple blaeberry ripened abundantly among the birch-trees and the pines. There long happy hours were spent by these two, and many quiet Sabbath evenings whiled gently away.

Often they sat on the General's Well, or on the flowering banks of canal or river, or in the woods beneath a red-stemmed pine ; and Donnie would beg a story, and lie listening and dreaming, with his eyes fixed on the dapple skies above him, and his head resting against Jeanie's knee.

And the stories were all of one kind. For Jeanie was learned but in one Book, and had no time or impulse to extend beyond. And her religion was like her learning, of the simplest.

She read ; from her earliest days, by her mother's knee, she had read or listened ; and all was completely real to her.

David, the young shepherd on the hills, the young soldier in the camp, or the great king upon the throne, was as living and real to her as any one she had ever remembered or known. Moses the shepherd and

leader of the ancient people. Jacob, with his flocks and his wanderings, and his rest by Bethel's well ; and his sons—the elder ones so strong and full of action and deep deceitful intent, and the younger, so very dear and so long lost, and so strangely found again.

All of them—the patriarchs and the heroes, the teachers and the humble ones who wrought in lowly places of the camp and in the pastoral homes of ancient Israel, and were led and enlightened and taught—all lived and breathed with undying life for Jeanie, and were to her beloved and quite familiar friends. There was Hannah, too, who made the white coat for her boy to attend the sanctuary ; Rebecca, who drew water and tended the shepherds at the well ; Ruth, who gleaned in the fields of the golden harvest ; and above all, Mary, the simple maiden of Nazareth, who had dwelt in her village home through her humble toilsome life in a quiet submission and acquiescence, as patient and as obscure as Jeanie's own ; Mary, and her husband the lowly carpenter, and her Wonderful and Beloved Son.

How familiar and true it all was to Jeanie. How closely these simple and grand undying histories seemed interwoven with her own. How really they all lived for her. How perfect was her sympathy and understanding of those deep simple lives.

All the country round seemed a part of them. The harvest fields of the smiling Leachkin were as the fields of Ruth. The fishing-boats that sailed out from Kessock were as the little old storm-tossed crafts of the Galilean Sea. And the voice of the Lord rang over the land, and His Spirit breathed power amid the poetry of nature, and sweetness through the stern things of life.

Out of the abundance of her heart, thus so richly if simply stored, Jeanie brought ever new wonders for her laddie, and dropped new treasures of countless price and lustre into the hidden and shadowy depths of his young soul.

The Bible and the "Catecheism" were all that were ever taught him at Jeanie's hands. But she got his mind and imagination stored with that wondrous lore of the times that have been. And she got him well through his Ten Commandments, with

the reasons annexed, and the results to arise therefrom. And in the course of years he had got the whole of the Paraphrases by heart at these Sunday restings by the river or in the wood, and could sing or say any one of them, at a moment's notice, from—

“O God of Bethel ! by whose hand
Thy people still are fed ;
Who through this weary pilgrimage
Hast all our fathers led”—

right on to the very end. And he learnt “The Lord’s my Shepherd,” too, and several grand old passages from the Old and the New Testaments—simply, as Jeanie said, “o’ the Word.” And all this embraced the whole serious and secular range of Donnie’s “education” until he was nearly ten.

I should like to tell a good deal more of those early years of Donnie’s life, for all was so sweet*and tranquil then. The months and seasons followed each other with such happy changes and ever welcome results ; every season bringing its own especial pleasures back along with it again, and every change

in the fair countenance of the country unfolding new beauty and charm.

His child-life on the river bank there, at the corner of the Little Green, was full of fantastic and characteristic attraction for every season of the year.

For in winter, even, he was not at a loss. If the ice bore on Loch-na-Shannish, or at the edge of the basin of the canal, he was away out there, watching the skaters or helping a score of little chaps of his own size to make a snow-mountain or a slide ; and finding his way invariably, when he was tired or hungry or cold, into the warm, cosy ingle-neuk of some farmhouse kitchen, where they made him gladly welcome to a stool before the big fire, and to a bannock of oaten bread.

When spring returned, all old and new delights came with it. The birds came out and sang to him ; and their nests, with pretty speckled eggs and wee downy fledglings, were abundant in the hedges and among the woods. The violets came up again, and the daisies starred the grass ; and soft golden tufts of primroses were to be found in plenty among the pine-roots on Tor-a-vean. Spring was a sweet, gleeful

time for him, and was full of promise of long summer days to come.

Then all summer he had the fishing—interesting on his own account, and intensely interesting as he watched the higher development of the noble sport in others. The brave gentlemen, clad in huge leggings and wielding gigantic rods, who stood from morn till dewy eve up to their waists in the rushing current, out near the very middle of the lordly stream: to see one of them land a salmon was a vision of thrilling excitement and delight to Donnie.

And then the coble nets, cast in the Friar's Shot or near the mouth of the river, in the dusky evening hours—what an enterprise of joy was that!

The laddie had a friend, of course, among the fishermen; and many a time he was taken with them, to sit at the bow of the coble, as they pulled valiantly up the stream, and then see the net ca't and run out, swiftly falling from the stern; and it ~~to spin~~ spin down the river with the current again, and danced, and whirled, and span past the Little Areen and under the bridge, and swept on till they were

cast ashore near Kessock, and he was landed, to run home as fast as his little feet could carry him, through the gathering shades of the night, to tell Jeanie of the "wonderful fishing," and to carry her some share of the spoil.

Then in autumn came the harvest-time and the glory of the corn-fields; and the delight of helping with pitchfork or broom, and of following the reapers and gleaning behind them, after the sheaves were gathered, on lovely autumn days. And then the nutting and the bramble-gathering, along the dyke-side and on the banks of the canal.

And Hallowe'en night, when spectral lights, made of scooped-out turnips, with a candle in them, went spinning down the river, and Donnie went singing round, along with a troop of other urchins, to the villas on the upper terrace and along the river banks—
—re of their pennies, and often also of their supper. For the "Geisers" are as welcome little visitors on Hallowe' Logmanay night, as the carol singers an English village, or the mummers or clowns, of the carnival abroad. Donnie was an enthusiastic "Geiser," and his fresh young voice,

carolling the quaint old songs, was familiar and long remembered by the river-side.

It was a glorious, free, roaming life the little fellow led, from January to December, among all his rough, kindly friends, with all his childish and happy occupations, and in those picturesque and characteristic scenes.

He grew hardy, healthy, and independent, acquiring a curious self-reliance on his own ever-ready and active energies; roving about from morning till night, from Monday till Saturday, in storm and sunshine, in heat and cold, always doing for himself and always helping somebody; a queer little free-lance in the community; an odd little sparrow-like being, hopping from twig to twig.

Returning always, however, to the same cosy nest as the night fell, and spending happy hours, through long quiet Sundays, and after the short day's work on Saturday afternoon, with Jeanie, who was ever there and ever ready to be the shelter and the anchorage of the little rover's life.

I could tell many more quaint things of these early days; but as they slipped by without many changes,

and with no special solitary events, and as it was not until Donnie was over fifteen that the particular circumstances came about which finally shaped and influenced his career, we must travel on towards that point.

He was just ten when Mr. Maclaren pounced down upon him, coming in upon him and Jeanie one Sunday evening of the autumn, just between the lights, when they had returned from their country walk, and were blowing up the peats between them, to make their supper.

Mr. Maclaren pounced down upon them, and asserted, decidedly, that—the laddie must go to school.



CHAPTER VI.

JEANIE'S CHARGE.

THIS event made a great change in many things.

First, the little scrimpity red kilt was given up, and Donnie was attired in a dignified suit of grey tweed jacket and trousers, made from a piece of cloth which Jeanie got cheap from the mill, and manufactured, indeed, out of pure friendship, by Mr. Nigel Maclean, that decent man who worked as a journeyman tailor in the Black Vennel on week-days, and earned an honest addition to his hard-won wage by attending the minister in the office of book-bearer in one of the crowded kirks on the Sabbath.

Equipped in these new garments of dignity, the laddie began his school-days. And on he went, steadily through them, year after year, learning all they could teach him in the Merkinch, and trudging

home to Jeanie's cottage when school-hours were over, every afternoon.

He was not very fond of his books, but he managed the daily tasks they set him with fair credit to himself; and he worked away with the feeling hastening him, that the sooner it was over the sooner he would be free—let loose again, to roam along the banks of his beloved river, and to disport himself at will.

How Jeanie managed through these schoolboy years was known only to herself, for she said nothing about it.

How she saved out of her earnings—which were scanty and hard-won indeed—sufficient to meet the school fees, and keep his porridge-bowl full night and morning, as he grew bigger and stronger yearly, and the quantity needed to sustain him became necessarily more and more; how she managed to turn him out, too, warmly clad, and trim and tidy—"weel darn'd and dune for"—Sabbath and week-day alike, no one thought even of asking her. She did it—that was enough.

The boy was her pride and her treasure, and she worked and gave up for him with a quiet courage,

that all who knew her silently applauded and admired. He was come "o' her ain folks;" a little branch of a humble family tree that had flourished quietly, in discreet independence, through many generations, from mother to daughter, from father to son; and as such he was at once a responsibility on her conscience and a charge upon her Scotch pride.

And besides this, with her whole, strong, faithful heart, she loved the little desolate boy. Hers had been a lonely hearth-side when he had been dropped there. And from the first night of his arrival, the glint in his brown eyes, and the sheen of his fair curls, and the ring of his eager young voice, had made the whole joy and sunshine of her little home.

No labour seemed too hard for his sake—in these first early days, when his bright baby face was there to greet her as she came home "wat and weary" from the mill. And all sacrifice of her own comfort and interest seemed as nothing, when she felt the warm touch of his clinging arms, as she carried him back, sound asleep, of a summer's night, from his fishing; or as she heard his murmuring words of tenderness and childish affection when she

tucked him into his little bed. He repaid her for everything by the sweetness he brought into the heart and the life within her, and by the brightness he made in her home.

She gave up, indeed, everything for him; everything which a lonely young being, as she was, might naturally have valued in life. For when the second loom worker at the Holme Mills looked kindly towards her one summer-time, and joined her in her walks down the river-side, and smiled his way for a certain distance into her heart, she turned gently away from him at last, for he was not such a one as she could feel perfectly certain would be a father true and tender to "Elsie's bairn." And that summer over (it was the first in which Donnie went to school), she gave the laddie her whole affection, and never looked away from him again.

With a sweet demure seriousness, before God and man, she took the charge laid upon her, and bent her shoulder bravely to bear the burden of the full requirements of the young life.

What it cost her no one inquired, though all knew pretty well about the Green and in the Holme Mills,

where many a kind action of help and encouragement was done by humble and warm-hearted friends for Jeanie and the boy.

And so she managed. The cruse was never entirely empty, and there was always a "puckle meal in the kist." And Providence was good to them, and sickness passed them by; and so the laddie grew and flourished, and Jeanie, his bonnie mother aged (as he grew up to an eager and vigorous boyhood) towards demure and sedate middle age.

Jeanie looked always years older than she really was, because of a sober maternal air she took at an early date to herself, and because of an earnest gravity and a quiet reserve which came over her fair, bonnie countenance, as year by year she pondered many things, and looked forward and took anxious and prayerful thought for her boy.

As the lad came on towards thirteen or fourteen, and grew tall and lithe and handsome as a young, wild, free thing of the mountain or the forest, a change seemed to creep gradually over his spirit and his ways.

He became restless, and was sometimes wayward in his habits and his mood; and Jeanie's face often

gathered a grave cloud as she watched him, and many thoughts went through her mind. She knew so much of him that he did not know of himself. She feared things in his character and in his future of which he knew no fear. And she sighed often as she bent over the peat-fire and stirred his porridge, and glanced from the bubbling pot to the brown face bending opposite to her own in the glowing flame, and as the restless, kindling expression in the dark eyes (which seemed daily to grow more eager and keen and hawk-like), met her own.

What was she to do with Donnie when school-days were over, and to what kind of "douce and decent trade" could she hope to tame and tether that young restless soul?

He got into one or two scrapes at school about this time, and Mr. Maclaren came again and spoke seriously to her. Not because he had anything really to suggest, nor that he wished to bring about, at that date, any change, but because it is always satisfactory when one has had at any time forebodings and prognostications, and these give, with developing circumstances, any evidence of being fulfilled—it is

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satisfactory to come and point it out to them for whose benefit had been the forebodings and the prognostications, that at least the fact of one's own far-reaching insight may be established.

So Mr. Maclaren came after one of these little scrapes and restive school rows of Donnie's, and said—

“Eh, Jeanie woman, whatna pack ye hae strappit upon yerself! Eh, my word, that laddie is a handfu'. He has the speerit o' a lion-cub growin' up in him, accordin' to Mister Tawse! May the Lord help ye, lassie. What, in the name o' conscience, are ye goin' to mak o' Donnie?”

“I dinna richt ken that indeed, sir,” said Jeanie soberly, and looking down with a quiet sigh. “He's a gude lad to me, Mister Maclaren, and I'm sorry, indeed, that Mister Tawse should be put about. But he's comin' on too big for the schule, maybe. I'm thinkin' I must put him to a trade.”

“And what trade will he settle to? Has he put his mind to anything parteeklar at all?”

“No richt yet whatever,” said Jeanie; “it's the fishing and the hill-side and the woods that he'll

be always after. I canna say, in truth, t'ye, Mister Maclaren, that he has a mind for any business o' the toon."

"Ah, Jeanie, that's jist the meeschief o't! It's in the bluid, woman; it's the roving and the randy vagrancy that's in the bluid. It'll beat ye, Jeanie, it'll beat ye. Do what ye will wi' him, it'll beat ye, early or late."

Jeanie took up the corner of her striped apron, and passed it gently over her eyes, as Mr. Maclaren uttered his grim prophecy with emphatic gesture and tone.

"It will beat ye. He is o' the real cast o' Ishmael, and it's a wild Hagar o' a mither he would need to hould head to him, and no a douce, saft-tongued woman like yoursel'. Eh, Jeanie, a thousand times I hae said t'ye, when the laddie was a wee callant, that the pack o' the chairge and education o' him was too weichty for the likes o' you to take upon your shoulder. And eh, lassie, I'm fair commencing to believe, from Mister Tawse's judicious judgment, that I tell't ye nae mair than the truth."

"Aweel, Mister Maclaren, sir," said Jeanie, "I'm

but an ignorant, hard-wrought woman mysel; and if I went agen your jidgment, sir, when I took in the laddie to the side o' the peat-hearth, and gied him a sup o' my ain porridge and a shelter in my bit hoose—aweel, Mister Maclaren, I'll hope it may be forgi'en me if I was ower venturesome and prood. But eh, sir, many and many a time, morning and evening diets at the North and at the High Kirk; and here, late and early by my lane, ha'e I put the laddie in the Lord's hand for His ain leading and defence. And I'm no feerd, Mister Maclaren, but He'll mind yet upon us, and mak' a' things richt for the laddie's trade. Eh, sir, He has never deceived me; He is no goin' to mak' it nicht and dairkness for me now. And if He do—if a' the troubles Mister Tawse and yerself is aye foreboding for me and for my laddie come wi cloud and storm upon us yet—aweel, sir, we'll jist bide till the mornin' brak agen, and be trustin' in the Lord's promise still. Eh, Mister Maclaren, my bonnie laddie has a kind, warm hairt; there's no fears for him, indeed. He's a wee bit rovin' and randy evenow, maybe, but he'll be a douce and decent tradesman one way or anither yet."

"I hope indeed he may—I hope he may," said Mr. Maclaren kindly, but with much discouraging doubt. "Ye mak' iver a gude case, Jeanie, for the lad. But be strong wi' him now, ma woman, and curb in his speerit; and I'll bid Mister Tawse no to spare the rod. Who knows, maybe we'll tame in the rebel, and get the harness upon his young shoulders yet! But it's in the bluid, Jeanie. My hairt much misgi'es me that it's the vagrant gipsy fire in him, and the rovin' temper, that will niver cool out o' the bluid."



CHAPTER VII.

WANDERINGS AFAR.

PERHAPS Jeanie's heart misgave her, also a little, when Mr. Maclaren had left her, and she waited long through the light summer evening for her boy. It was Saturday, and a half holiday, and he had gone off after his bit of frugal dinner, and where he had gone she had no idea.

The old wanderings up and down the river, and the roving gipsying existence which the child had led in and out of the nooks and corners of the Little Green, had extended over a much wider plain of enterprise as Donnie went from childish to schoolboy years. And now, when lessons were over—and Jeanie did not seem to need him in the wee house—away Donnie would go on long rambles, often alone, and rarely with any plan or purpose. He would go up the Leachkin Braes towards Craig Phatrich, or by the

canal-side towards Loch Ness ; or down by Clachnaharry to the rough shores of the Firth, where countless wild things of beauty and wonder were to be found and gathered ; or sea-birds or fishing-boats to be watched on their billowy way. He grew just at this time to care less about his river fishing, and much more about his country rambles, extending far and wide. He got to know every road and wood and burn and craggy promontory, on hill or sea-shore, all around for miles. And on many of those summer evenings Jeanie kept the porridge for him simmering warm by the peat-fire, until he came home tired and sunburnt, but perfectly happy, to fling himself for a sound night's slumber on his hard bed.

She did not mind this. It was all a part of the ways and habits of her boy ; and it all seemed harmless enough to her and very easy to be understood, this eager, passionate love of his for the freedom and the beauty of the hills, until Mr. Maclaren put it into her head that it was the wandering gipsy nature in him, and she began to feel misgivings, with silent anxiety, as to its results and end.

For she loved her laddie dearly ! Would he leave

his adopted mother and her peat fireside, and her quiet little home, some day, and become, like his father before him, a wild vagrant gipsy indeed?

That same evening she spoke to him, Mr. Mac-laren's words burning hotly in her heart.

"Donally, my laddie," she said, as he sat over against her and blew the peat to warm up his little porridge pot, and chattered merrily to her of his grand long holiday walk, "Donally, ye're an idle randy, surely, to tak' pleasure in rovin' the country from Craig Phatrach to Obriachan from noon till nicht—for a' the wuld like a wraith, laddie, that canna be at rest. What took ye up the Loch-side the day?"

"O Jeanie! it was sae blythe and bonnie awayonder amang the heather and the rocks. Eh, but the water was jumpin' in the wee falls beyond Dunain Hill like diamonds on the moss and the grey stanes. I dinna ken what took me up the Loch-side, but I just *be* to go. I couldna turn hame, whatever, till I got above Obriachan braes. I got a glint o' the wild goats there the day, Jeanie," he continued with an eager glance; "it

was real beautiful to see them spring from crag to crag."

"I'm thinkin' ye're fair daft, laddie," she answered, "for the woods 'and for the hills."

"I like Obriachan the best," said Donnie critically. "When I come out on the bracken there, and see the Loch away for miles before me, and the country lyin' so quiet like, and the hills wi' their heads up among the clouds in the sky, eh, I feel fine and free, Jeanie. When I set off after dinner the day, I was just faint and weary-like till I reached Obriachan brae."

"Ye're just an idle rover," she repeated, smiling kindly, however, the while, as she almost echoed his enthusiasm, and met the eager light in his kindling eyes. "It's no a fine eddication for an honest trade, laddie, to be rovin' like a vagrant over the hills. What can you say to that, Donnal?—and ye must be thinking on yer trade, ma man."

The boy's face clouded, and a grave look came into his eyes, as he turned them again with quick glances upon hers.

"Is't a trade o' the toon, Jeanie?"

"I canna tell ye that, my lad," she answered, "but an honest trade, whatever, it must be."

Donnie sighed again, but remained silent.

"Are ye pitten yer mind on anything par-teeklar?" she continued, Mr. Maclaren's exhorting tones still weighing hard upon the heart within her, and she doing her utmost to throw a grave and business import into her words. "Ye'll be a fine-grown laddie soon; and ye canna aye be bidin' idle by my peat fire, when ye're done the schuling, Donnie. Nor can ye get yer honest bread, I fear me, in wanderin' among the hills."

"I'll tak' the trade ye put on me," said Donnie resolutely. "I'll work and wrastle, Jeanie, long enough for you. But if it warna for the thochts o' yersel, and that it would be lonesome for ye here by the fire o' a winter's nicht, I'd no tak' a trade o' the toon, whatever, Jeanie—I think I'd just rin awa'."

"Awa'!" said Jeanie; "and where is't in the world ye'd gang till? What's takin' the laddie now?"

“I dinna much ken where I’d gang till, Jeanie. But, whatever, I’d gang awa’. I wud tak’ the road, maybe, up across the Leachkin, through the woods below Craig Phatrich, there, and I’d wander amang the heather doon by the other side. And I’d rove through the Aird. Eh, it’s winderful bonnie yonder in the fall-time, when the harvest along the shore is all ripe aboot the head o’ the Firth. And I wud gang, Jeanie—I kenna whère—nicht and day, when the moon is shinin’ oot and glintin’ upo’ the water, and the sky is so deep and blue. That wud be *my* trade, I’m thinkin’, if it wasna for yer ain sel’. I’d be a rover and a randy, I weel believe ye, until I was fair tired oot wi’ the freedom and the beauty o’ every corner o’ the land.”

“And a fine trade that would be for ye,” said Jeanie bitterly, while the hot tears gathered swiftly in her eyes,—“a bonnie trade! Eh, laddie, will ye brak’ my hairt wi’ yer haverin’s and a’ yer rovin’ on the hills? Eh, will ye brak’ my hairt?”

“I’ll no brak’ yer hairt, Jeanie,” he said stoutly. “Na, na, dinna fear for me. I’ll be a tailor loon, or a weaver, or I’ll carry the baker’s baps—or ony

ither thing, I will do, that ye put upon me. It's not to roam the hills and the heather, that I'll think to be leavin' you. Na, na; get ye me a trade, Jeanie, and I'll put my mind to't, according as yersel' and Mister Maclaren may say. I ha'e a great love for the hills and the braesides, and I'll aye be wanderin', I'm thinkin', towards them, when I'll have an idle or an easy hour. But I'll bide here at hame, for all my haverin's. So for the matter o' that, whatever, ye needna greet a tear for me."

"Eh, Donally," she then answered him, as the bitterness left her voice, and her eyes glistened softly through her tears, "didna I tell yon same to Mister Maclaren?—that ye had a warm kind hairt, and that whatever come the way for us, you'd tak' thocht for me. I spak true till him, laddie. When they call ye a roving randy, and when they tell me that ye're awfu' prood, and that ye canna tak' a humbling wurd or a froon aff o' ane o' them, I canna say them nae. But when they tell to me that I'll hae a sair hairt for ye, a'e day yet, Donnal,

I can aye gi'e answer, that if so, it'll be the Lord's hand that'll put the trouble on me, and I must e'en just bow to His will. It'll be no deed nor purpose, laddie, o' yours."



CHAPTER VIII.

THE ROVING LADDIE.

DONNIE had no understanding, as Jeanie had for him, of those tastes and impulses which drove him ever to the hills and woods.

Up to this time he thought or asked nothing of his own history and belongings in the days before the Green was his home. He remembered very little and very indistinctly. And although he sometimes, in his solitary hours, mused over these dim old memories, and wondered over the vague haunting impression of another loving countenance and another mother—not like Jeanie at all—he said nothing about it. For though an incessant chatterer on all subjects of external interest, he never, at any time, was wont to say much about his inner feelings and ideas. He asked Jeanie

nothing, and she said nothing to him on the subject at all.

In this she was wrong, perhaps, and did her poor cousin's memory less justice than was her due, in letting her reflection fade gradually out of the boy's mind and life. And Jeanie often feared that it might be wrong.

But she had the terror ever haunting her, that if she told him of his parents and his own origin; if he ever knew of that vagrant race to which he belonged; if he realised, that roaming, as he loved to roam, freely under the blue starlight skies, and dwelling, as he would love to dwell, upon the hillsides and among the woods and vales—were a people to whom, by descent and tastes and instincts, he really did belong,—she feared that even his love for herself would be sorely tried, and stretched to its very limit, in the strong temptation that would beset him, to go off to his father's race again, and be (as he was) wild, unfettered, and free.

So she kept silence. And all the neighbours respected her discreet and proud silence; because

so beloved was the bright-eyed boy among them all, that none, even in play or derision called him, before his face, as they did often when he was not bye—

“Jeanie’s roving laddie, the gipsy’s bairn.”

The Black Soldier, who, from a foe grew into a friend of Donnie’s about this time, called him indeed “ye young gipsy” now and again. Said it right out to his face sometimes, when he found the lad stretched under a drooping tree, far up the river side. But he said it in a kindly rallying way, to which Donnie attached no importance; and he only fancied the old soldier meant that he was never tired of wandering to and fro.

The Black Soldier took a fancy to the lad, finding him now-a-days, as he did, much oftener stretched dreamily among the flowers upon the river’s bank, than committing depredations in the stream.

The old fellow took it into his head that Donnie was born to grace a red coat, and used to expend long hours in trying to induce him to enlist. Indeed he effectually fired the boy with much

military ardour; and Donnie sought his friend's society in these years as assiduously as, in old days, he had fled it. He was ever on the alert to catch the Black Soldier, and to beguile him to a *sederunt* on the general's well—of which the name was enough to inspire the veteran with stirring reminiscences of "Quarter-Brass."

"I dinna ken but I will be a sodger yet," Donnie used to say in answer often—as the Water Bailie flourished his stick with enthusiasm, and wound up his story with terrific effect. "It must be a fine life to go wandering across the world, wi' the drums and the fifes; and the flags flying; and to see the cannons fired in the battle, and a' the enemies runnin' awa'! I dinna ken but I'll be a sodger. If it was na for Jeanie, whatever,—I'm thinkin' I'd e'en go and 'list at Fort George."

"Eh, man, keep ye till yer books the now," the Black Soldier would conclude with prudence; "what would they mak' in a regiment wi' sich a bit callant as you? Keep ye to the schule, and keep oot o' the ruver, and ye'll be a braw fine sodger when ye're a weel-grown laddie yet."

Donnie's imagination would occasionally wander along this definite path at least!

And truly he was of the stuff of which the finest soldiers have, by fate and fortune, been often made!

Strong, and eager, and brave; restless and enterprising, gentle and true; rebellious, perhaps impatient, beneath injustice or tyranny, but obedient to laws of which he acknowledged the rightful rule.

And with a certain fine grain in his character, a curious dash of romance, of chivalry, of ideality—concerning something, apart from result of any kind, which he saw was intrinsically grand and good.

A something this, which was difficult to understand in the crude, unformed, half-developed nature. A something which Jeanie felt was in his character, but of which *she* could certainly give no description in words. A something which, under circumstances likely to ripen the germ within him, might expand to ideals and actions of heroism and self-sacrifice—of no common kind!

CHAPTER IX.

THE GIPSIES' CAMP.

IT was a Saturday afternoon, in the autumn of that same summer in which Mr. Maclaren had once more taken Jeanie to task concerning the laddie, and on which she (acting on the wise suggestion of that divine) had set the boy's mind at work on the vital question of his trade.

It was a lovely autumn day. And school over at twelve, and Jeanie not yet come back from the mill,—away went Donnie with a piece of oatcake for dinner in his pocket—bent on a long nutting excursion with a dozen other fellows of the Green—up across Tor-a-vean and along the “Planting” road towards Dochgarroch.

There were not many hazelnut trees along these parts, but they hoped to get as far as Obriachan, the soft clustering woods by the loch-side.

There, there were nuts in plenty. And in the meantime, while they rambled among the woods of the Planting, and along the hill-sides, there were brambles and numberless wild things of wonder and beauty and interest to be found. Rabbits to hunt up from their holes, and to chevy among the red pine stems, and birds to watch and follow to their hidden nests. Plenty of growing or living things, in fact, to amuse and delight them through the sunny afternoon, as after a week's schooling and imprisonment they escaped gleefully from out the town.

Donnie often started with a troupe of schoolfellows on this Saturday's walk; and together with them he could trudge along the dusty road to the canal bridge, perhaps whistling and shouting, and making a regular good schoolboy's row with the best of them, sending forth his voice in vigorous youthful argument and noisy controversy into the sunny air.

But when they got to the woods, and had rambled up among the gorse and the bracken, along Tor-a-vean side, he, somehow, generally got away from them all; and nine Saturday evenings out of ten he would find himself wandering home in solitude, after

a long expedition made quite alone, in which he had forgotten entirely about the other fellows, and lost sight of them altogether.

He had a different way of taking the wood life and the free open country from what they had. The pursuit of something, from a sandpiper or a weazle to an old cow ; the gathering or eating up or collecting together of something—berries, nuts, firewood, perhaps only faded beech leaves for the pig's bed—all or one of these objects generally absorbed the other boys, who came in gangs from out the town. Some thrifty purpose or some mischievous pursuit gave aim and zest to their rambles,—but with him it was otherwise.

He often gathered sticks for Jeanie, indeed, and brought her woodland treasures of every kind of a Saturday night, either for use or ornament ; and he generally came out with an avowed object—nutting, berry-gathering, or weazle-hunting, like the rest, but he was very apt to forget it all.

Once in the woods ; once away amongst the pines and sweet-smelling heather, and far up on the heights, and he forgot every other cause for being

there, save the sweet wild enjoyment of the woods and the mountains in themselves.

A keen new life would come to him, once alone on the hill-side there; and a swift thrill of this life would animate every limb and gesture, as he bounded forward, that quick, eager pulse bringing new energy to his movements and new light to his eyes.

He seemed a different boy to himself, then, from what he was on the benches of the Merkinch school; and after an hour's roving enjoyment of the woods and the heather, new powers seemed to live within him, with quite new thoughts and feelings, which had no existence down in the precincts of the town.

This all seemed especially the case this bright autumn afternoon. The air was so light, the sky so soft and dapple, the sun so brilliant and yet so tempered by soft drifting clouds,—he seemed to speed as if on wings; all his vigorous young energies alive and alert; his elastic steps carrying him quickly forward, now he had got well rid of the others, and was out upon the open beyond Tor-a-vean and the Planting wood.

He walked rapidly on, and by the time the sun was sinking westward, and the first glow of its setting radiance beginning to paint the far-off horizon of the sky, he had reached the hill above Lochnalairn, and was descending with the full view of the loch and its encircling hills lying outspread once more before him. He had attained his point—nutting and brambles were forgotten.

He paused a moment, and heaved one glad exultant sigh. His eyes sparkled; he was his own true woodland self again. He was at liberty. He was beneath the boundless blue skies, beyond the limits of the valley and its associations of restraint. Above all, he was alone. He might let his restless young spirit break away from its bars of custom and grim restriction, and let it roam in wild freedom, as if borne on soft wings of the wind.

This was one ideal of life to Donnie! He expanded his chest to breathe the strong air from the up-lands, and bared his curly head to let the wind sweep round his brow; then on he went, down the slope from which the prospect was so wide and fair.

What a view that was, indeed, on which he rested his eager eyes !

Right away to Fort Augustus the loch lay unveiled, its restless surface glistening in the afternoon sun-glow, and rippling away into deep reflections beneath the shadow of the hills. Great glens cleft the loch-sides at many points, with turbulent mountain rivers flowing through their hollows and tumbling in grand cataracts over the rocks. But from here the whole circlet of the dark hills seemed one and complete, only down their steep and dusky sides small silvery streams and waterfalls marked their courses by the soft verdure of the grassy vales and clustering birch-woods through which they flowed. Rocky boulders stood out clear and defiant against the blue and grey marled sky. Dark pine trees crowned the hill tops ; and stretches of purple heather—moorlands for the grouse, or so-called “forests” for the deer—rose bare and unwooded from the strong and wave-washed margins of the loch. Away about ten miles upon the right-hand bank, Urquhart Castle, a stern and rugged ruin, stood out in grim solitude from the shore, its towers and crumbling walls and strong

foundations throwing a dark reflection deep into the glistening waters, and making a sharp clearly-defined centre for the view. Feathery woods and undulating park lands lay on either side the water in the foreground, and amidst them lay the turrets and roofs of Dochfour and Aldourie, with their lawns and gardens sloping to the loch-side. It was a lovely bit of view, full of poetry and softness in the foreground, and with the charm of wild distant beauty as well.

Coming down the hill, Donnie exulted and delighted in it with a rapture quite inexplicable to himself. He came on into the hollow, where the loch again was lost to view. On he walked, till the fringe of the Darroch was reached, where at length he came decidedly to a halt.

This was a favourite resting-point with him. It was a little oak wood—for such the word “Darroch” means—a little clustering nook of oaks, where the undergrowth was russet brown now, with fading fern leaves, and where a tiny streamlet ran over mossy stones.

It had a romance for him this little corner, and he was apt to fancy that just here, in some strange sort

of Robinson-Crusoe way, he would like to live. The Darroch always attracted him, and he turned and plunged into it now.

He pushed his way through the thick underwood. He wound among the oak trees, and then, suddenly, he came to a halt again. A sound struck upon his ear! He heard voices—mingling, noisy, laughing, wrangling voices. Evidently to-day, in his favourite wild woods, Robinson Crusoe was not alone.

He paused, and he listened; then he pushed his way on again. He went deeper into the wood, till he came to a thicker and more closely grown path. He approached nearer to the echo of voices, but he saw nothing to explain the unusual sound, until at length—just as he came into the heart of the wood, where there was, as he knew, a little opening and a clear grassy plot, and a vista in the trees, letting in a bit of distant view westward towards the loch—he saw, first, a wreath of blue soft smoke, curling up among the tree-tops towards the sky; then an up-turned cart, a couple of donkeys, and a tethered horse. Then two rough, low, canvas tents; a big wood fire burning brightly in front of them, and a

group of men, boys, women, and little children clustering together around.

One of the men was just fastening three long poles in a tripod, and another stood waiting, with a huge iron pot in his hand, ready to sling it on the long-hook pendant from between the poles.

It was a gipsy encampment. Donnie understood this as a fact at once. He had seen something like it often before now. There were plenty of "tinkers" (as they were always called about that country) to be seen philandering through the Aird or down the loch-sides, and on Culloden Moor, too, during every summer-time.

But this encampment did not seem to be quite of the common kind. The tents were more neat and trim—not so black and ragged. The donkeys were big and well fed. The horse was strong, and apparently groomed; and the people themselves had not the impoverished and forlorn look of the ordinary tinker. The children were not ragged at all. Indeed they were well covered and rosy-cheeked, if brown as little hazel nuts, dirty as little ground-mice, and with eyes like ripe brambles every one. And

the men and boys, and the couple of tall graceful women, looked also quite comfortably and well clothed. Their faces were merry and lively, too, and their figures stalwart and strong.

Donnie stood fascinated. He watched and gazed—it was a new and curious scene to him. It was like a bit out of one of his day-dreams ; or like a picture out of one of the story-books of wild adventure, of which a few had come his way.

He stood and watched. The poles were tied, the kettle was slung, the fire was stirred vigorously, and then they all clustered round, and laughed and chattered, as the log blazed up and the blue smoke curled away over the tops of the trees.

A minute, and Donnie was disturbed, however—brought down from his day-dreams, and recalled from his wondering observation, to reality, and to a sense of his presence being uninvited there.

There was a noise behind him. Quick footsteps trod the ferns at his back—there was a shout of “Hullo, my mate !” and he turned to see, the thick branches of the autumn trees divided before a pair of strong arms, and by the grasp of two brown hands.



IN THE DARROCH.

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And he encountered the sun-tanned face, and big, black, inquisitive eyes of a boy, some inches taller than himself, who was pushing through ferns and brambles and oak trees, towards the green opening of the encampment, and who had knocked against Donnie quite unexpectedly on his way.

"Hullo!" he repeated, and Donnie stood still and stared, and the bigger boy did the same for an instant, after repeating his exclamation once again.

He was a handsome fellow; a thorough gipsy, not a bit like the grimy-faced tinkers they called gipsies sometimes in the town, but a Romany of southern blood, with a southern Spanish-like fire in his black eyes; with strong supple limbs and delicate features, and clear brown skin, and with hair jet black as a raven's wing, curling close round his forehead, as he pushed his cap back and exclaimed at Donnie again.

The boys found in each other instantly mutual interest and fascination. They were so unlike, and yet, in certain points of their appearance, so like one another as well.

Donnie was also tall and lithe limbed. He had a brown dusky cheek, and soft, large, dark-shaded

eyes; and he had the same delicately-cut features as the black-haired lad who faced him, but in other points he was different. Donnie had light brown hair, clustering over his sunburnt forehead; and there was a warm, ruddy flush, mingling with the brown and dusky tints of his fresh young cheeks. He was Scotch, and a Fraser, as well as a gipsy and a Raffe.

"Hullo!" said the bigger boy again; "and what do you want, my friend?"

"I dinna want anything," said Donnie. "I was but lookin' at the bonnie fire."

"Eh, *bonnie* fire! a capital fire, I suppose, you mean. Well, it is a pretty good 'un, and that's a good job; and the pot's a swinging, too, and that's a better. For I'm as hungry as a hawk. Eh, my chap, are you seekin' a bit o' supper?"

"Na, na!" said Donnie, "I'm seekin' naething. But oh, it's a bonnie spot, and it's a bonnie fire, and—I'm no but lookin' at them. It's a fine life, I'm thinkin' to be a gipsy; and ye'll be one o' them, may be, yersel'?"

"I am one of them. I am Robin Raffe, at your

service, my master. And if you have a silver sixpence about you anywhere, I'll toss you for it, at the flat stone down yonder,—I'll give you doubles or quits. Who knows?—I may earn my supper or lose yours to you? Have you a sixpence, my hearty, or (I'm not proud) I'll toss you for a tanner or a tizzy, just as it comes,—I'll come down to hap'orth, if that's all you can go."

"I have got nothing on me," said Donnie respectfully, looking up with much wonder into the lad's dark face, and then away out beyond him to the festooned autumn leaves above his head, and round upon the encampment and the whole picturesque scene. "I have nothing upon me at all. I wish I had, but I have not, altho' I'm seekin' nothing o' you; but—will ye say it again, laddie? Will ye tell me once again—what did ye say was yer name?"

"My name is Robin—Rob, for short, I'm called. And Raffe is my father's—there, that's him yonder stirring the big pot. But what's that to you, my master? and what's the good of you if you have not as much as a brown to toss on that flat stone?"

"Raffe?" said Donnie slowly, "ye're the first that iver I saw o' the name, then, excepting my ain sel', wha'tiver, and that's a very curious thing too."

"Yourself! Are you of the old clan, my mate? By Jingo! Impossible! You aint a Raffe, my pretty fellow! with these linty locks and red cheeks of yours! Tell that to the marines! Raffles are all gipsies—every one of us, from father to son."

"My name is Donall Raffe," said the other, "and it's truth I'm tellin' ye; and I'm the only one o' my name in a' the toon."

Rob stared at him again for one minute longer, as they stood facing one another, and were still unnoticed from the camp. And then he suddenly gave a shout, and sprang forward and seized Donnie by the shoulder.

"Hullo," he exclaimed, "this *is* a business! Come along, I say,—you come along directly; you come and see my granny this very minute."

"What?" said Donnie, starting back, but laughing, too, in spite of himself at the other lad's eagerness and determination.

"Come along, I say," continued Rob; "I am sure you are him,—the very chap we've come all down the country to look after. Hurrah! I am quite sure of it! Come along, I say, to my granny—she's beyond the fire, in the biggest tent, down there."

And dragging Donnie, half amused and half-interested and much astonished, along with him, Rob plunged through the oak-wood and over the bracken and bramble bushes and clustering mosses and grass, right away down into the depths of the hollow, where the big log fire blazed and smoked and crackled amidst the gipsy tents.

"Hullo, I've got him!" shouted Robin.

"What's up, my hearty?" cried the first man they knocked against, pausing in his stirring of the fire to look round upon the two boys.

"What darned nonsense are you at now, Rob?" shouted another, raising his head from his occupation of peering into the bubbling pot; "who have you got there, and what mischief are ye up to?"

"I ain't at nothing," exclaimed Rob indignantly; "but you just have a look at this spicy chap, dad, and ask him his name. Look at him, and look at

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Vix Spratt, Aunt Bella's little varmint—and if these two crafts bain't carved out of something of the same log, I'm a Dutchman! That's all I know about it. You ask him his name, dad, and where he comes from—I guess you'll hear summut to make you stare."

The two men turned round upon the boys now, and gave up their occupation over the fire and supper-pot to have a look at Donnie, and to listen to Rob's words.

"Gad!" said one of them, who Robin had called his father. "Jingo! but you are trim, young chap! What is your name, my hearty, and—what is your name to me?"

"Donall Raffe is my name!" said Jeanie Nairn's laddie, looking boldly up into the dark and rather evil face which had turned on him with a hard stare.

"Donald Raffe!" he repeated; and at that moment a brown-faced old woman appeared at one of the tent doors.

The two men had exclaimed something incomprehensible to one another, had exchanged glances, and had then continued speaking low and fast in an

unknown tongue. And they were both still staring at Donnie when the old woman appeared.

"Here, granny," Rob's father called to her, "come here and see this smart young chap. What has brought *you* wandering down the lochside here again—after sixteen years, granny, eh? Whom are you on the look-out for, I say?"

The old woman came tottering forward, leaning heavily upon her stick. She looked feebly round from one to the other, her black eyes sparkling, her brown withered face bent down, and with her shoulders curved with frailty and age.

"I am come," she said, "to seek my Will's wife and boy, Jim. I promised him, to seek them out again, on his dying bed. Eh! Will's boy must be a big lad now, I'm thinking, Jim. And Elsie Fraser—whom he went from our tents, in this very spot, to marry, sixteen years ago this very harvest-moon—where is she? She came backwards again to her own old country here, and to her people; and she carried Will's boy with her, little more than an infant when she went. I never see'd one nor the other of them since that same day myself, Jim. And Will

repented sore for driving her from him when he came to lie down to die."

"And so we've all come down the valley to look for them," laughed Jim, standing with the long stirring stick in his hand, and looking round upon his old mother with a pacifying expression on his face and in his tones. "We have come to look for Will's wife and chickabiddy, mother. Just to satisfy your longing to hear something of what was property of his;—well! Rob has got a chap here—where he found him he best knows—but a likely chap! Have a look at him. Take your hat off, my hearty, and turn round upon the granny, will you, and tell her your blessed name. Did you ever hear it before, old lady?" he continued; "Donald Raffe—is not that your name, my little chap? And is it not a name we've heard amongst us before?"

"Donald Raffe!—Will's boy!" exclaimed the old woman, tottering up to Donnie and looking into his bright young face. "Will's boy! Eh, Jim, do you say so? Will's boy—Donald Raffe! Have we found you so easily? Have we found you, my dear?"

"My name is Donnie Raffé," said the lad hesitatingly, and wondering within himself, indeed, what it all could mean. And wondering at the same time, with that curious sensation with which memory torments and mocks us—if it were a dream—an old, far-off recollection—or merely fancy—or what—the idea that came forcibly over him returning again and again—that he had seen them all before; that he had been here once upon a time, in this very spot with them; and that he had sat round the big log fire, and slept in these brown low tents, and eaten his bit of supper from that smoking caldron. When had he ever done it? Was it a dream, or a recollection, or a shadowy vision reminding him of some former or forgotten life?

It was no dream; but it was a very old memory of which the consciousness and the realisation had gradually dawned afresh—as he stood and stared about him and listened wonderingly now. An early infant memory! But it was not of this spot. It was of these very people, indeed; of these same tents and grey old donkeys and queer up-tilted carts;

but it had not been here that he had known them. It was far away in a southern corner of the land that Elsie Raffe had left her husband's tribe and wandered homewards; her boy, merely a lisping, baby thing, hanging wearily upon her shoulder, or trotting gallantly by her side. It was a very distant memory, and a forgotten one till now. But there was no doubt about it.

A few minutes more and the old grandame had recognised the vivid likeness without question. He bore the name her son's wife had given him—"Donald"—a name of her own old country and her home tribe.

And his surname was even their very own. It had been his father's—Will Raffe—her beloved and elder son; the brother of Jim, and of Aunt Bella Spratt, the dark-eyed woman who came forward now with the supper mugs and platters of shining tin.

And Donnie was hailed as one of them,—a "Raffe"—the grandson, nephew, and cousin of the whole wild woodland tribe. And it all quite delighted him. Down he sat among them on the brown, dry grass!

He took it all for granted. They knew all about him and could tell him more than he could tell them. But he told them what he could.

"I am Jeanie Nairn's son and laddie now, this many a year," he said, "she's all the mither that I mind on, or ken. Eh, and she's a gude mither to me too," he added, with a warm flush upon his cheek.

"She was Elsie's kinswoman," said the old woman. "Yes, and she's tooken you, has she? and poor Elsie's dead."

It was thus that Jeanie Nairn's laddie found his lost relations. It was thus he realised himself of a gipsy clan. It was thus, in one bright Saturday's walk, he learnt — roaming in the Darroch there and coming suddenly upon them — that he was in reality and by birthright a wandering son of the woods and forest-glades and mountain heights; as by taste and nature he, in truth, belonged to them — ever since he could remember or knew anything at all!

And here, sitting round their log fire with this

strange new-found people of his own, he passed a curious and happy evening. Sharing their supper in tin mugs and platters from out the steaming pot; and hearing, and (as a matter of course) taking in and believing, every word the old woman, or Jim, or Robin Raffe shouted on either side of him about his father or his mother, or his own infant days.

Rob fancied he could remember him, for Rob was a year or so the elder of the two. And Jim (Rob's father) remembered all about him, and laughed and talked loud and merrily of the old times, seventeen years ago, when they had all loafed down here about a Northern meeting-time, a whole gang of them together indeed. And had had capital fun, and good sport, and paying times. And when Will, his big, black-eyed brother Will, strolling home up the river's bank one Sunday evening, had met and fallen in love with that bit of a yellow-haired girl, Elsie Fraser, the best loom-worker in the Holme Mills.

"She made a poor thing as a gipsy," Jim added finally, "and she left us down in Devonshire one autumn while Will was away."

And Donnie was her son; there was no doubt about it. The boy believed it as certainly as they did—and it was a delightful thought to him.

As he rambled home late on towards nightfall (after Robin had parted from him at the Planting's edge), his mind was full and bright of the romance and weird interest of his discovery. And he hastened home to tell Jeanie, and to ask of her explanations still more full and clear.

"Jeanie would know all about it," he thought, "and why had she not told him all this time?"

Ah, why indeed!

Jeanie's mind was possessed with strange consternation when Donnie at last got home to her and told his news.

"Eh! my word, whatna peety, whatna peety!" she said with gentle and heartfelt pathos, as she sat wringing her hands opposite Donnie, over against him on the other side of the small peat fire. "Is it the Raffes that's come? Deed, then, and it's trouble that'll be traivellin' wi' them. O Donnie, my ain wee laddie! will ye no keep clear o' the Raffes?"

"But if they're my ain people, Jeanie?" urged

Donnie doubtfully; "if they're my fayther's kin— mustna I gang and be weel wi' them? Mustna I go whiles and see the auld puir body who is sayin' she's my grandmither hersel'?"

"Ye must gae to see her, maybe. Ay, ay, ye must gae. But keep clear o' them, laddie. And dinna be thinkin', like my bonnie Elsie, yer ain mither, thocht, that the wild life's the free life; and that the dule we thole in outlandish vagrant ways is lichtner than the dacent burden o' wurk an' patience we may bear at hame. O laddie! dinna think to gae awa' wi' the Raffes. Dinna think to lave my ain fireside till ye get a better place to gae till, whaiver."

"I'm na thinkin' to lave ye, Jeanie, but I'll need to gae and see the Raffes. Eh! but it's a bonnie place they hae oot there o't, and it's a fine lightsome life to rove awa' amang the woods."

"So yer puir mither thocht afore ye," sighed Jeanie, "and she larnt her mistake before the end, whaiver. She was glad to lie down in my wee dacent placie here, and to lave the roving o' the woods for the shelter o' a house. Dinna be

taken up wi' 't, laddie; dinna gie yer mind to the Raffles."

"I dinna like nane o' them, but Robin, greatly," said Donnie philosophically. "It's the fire, and the brown tents, and the greenwoods, and the life! It's no for the Raffles that I would gae, Jeanie. Unless to say a word to my fayther's mither, her that'll be the only one right belongin' to mysel'. But Rob, he, too, is my cousin, Jeanie, if Jim Raffe's my ain fayther's brither, which they say is sure. Oh, it's strange!—I thocht nobody owned me, and I thocht you were a' I had o' people in the world; but now I ken. O Jeanie! I'm glad that I hae a tribe and a people. I kenned iver that I wasna one of them here by the ruver, or on the Green either at a'; and I always windered; but now, Jeanie, I ken. I'll no lave ye, though, to gae awa' along wi' them. For that ye needna fear!"



CHAPTER X.

A VISIT FROM ROB.

BUT Jeanie did fear; she feared exceedingly. And when next day, just after they returned from kirk, while Donnie was loafing about on the Green and she was preparing the dinner, there appeared at her little open door a tall, black-haired boy, with mischievous eyes and a gleaming smile, Jeanie felt a sinking at her heart of sore fear and anxiety; for she could not tell, indeed, what might "come over" Donnie, as she thought, now his own wild, wandering people had discovered him.

"I want Don Raffe," said the tall, black-haired boy to her that Sunday, with a bold stare round her little room, and with an easy defiant manner that seemed to ask no permission or leave. "I want my cousin. Is it here he lives?"

"Donald Raffe bides here wi' me," said Jeanie

gently; "and if ye're his kinsman, my lad, ye're welcome in. Come awa' ben the hoose and tak' a bit o' dinner; Donnie Raffie 'll be in the now."

"Thank'e," said the young gipsy; "you're pleasant and hospitable, and I'm as hungry as a hunter, I confess. I'll come in since ye're so friendly, and I'm glad to find my cousin in such a tidy berth. My stars! I never laid eyes on a pot of finer potatoes!"

"Ye're kindly welcome to a share o' them," said Jeanie, setting down a plate and salt-cellar, and fetching her Sunday's butter and a pile of fresh oatcakes. "Ye're welcome," she repeated, as the lad exclaimed in satisfaction, and made a vigorous dive into the pot of potatoes, which looked tempting enough after his long walk.

"Here's a fine fellow!" he exclaimed, as he abstracted a huge laughing potato. "These are better than the sackful I weeded out for the bluff farmer of Dunain last night," he added *sotto voce*. "I should like to know the field these came out of, if it's within reach."

"The 'taties came from the Bught," said Jeanie civilly. "Mr. Roy, the griever, always keeps a gude

puckle back frae the mairket for me. He has been a kind freend this mony a year."

"Eh, and do you think he has hoed them all up already?"

"I canna say, I'm sure," said Jeanie; and at that moment Donnie came across the door.

"Hullo!" shouted their visitor.

"Rob!" exclaimed Donnie.

"Here I am," said the other; "I've looked you up, you see, without delay. We are all tremendously glad out there to have dropped upon you; and I just said I'd take a turn and look out for you to-day."

"Jeanie, it's Robin Raffie," said Donnie, glancing at her to see how she liked her visitor.

"Ay, ay, Donally, I ken him weel," said Jeanie quietly. "Come awa' and tak' yer denner, laddie. Yer cousin is takin' a 'tatie along wi' us. Come awa', Donall; come awa'."

The two boys had an attraction for one another, there was no doubt about that. It developed instantly and mutually; and although it filled Jeanie with anxiety, she could say nothing to interfere when

Rob, from that day, came again and again, through all the following weeks, to her cottage.

He arrived there generally just as Donnie's school hours were over, always very hungry and wanting something to eat. Often persuading Donnie into an impromptu meal long before Jeanie had returned from her mill work, and afterwards beguiling him out for the evening to idle about the river's banks or in the town. Jeanie was full of anxiety, but what could she do?

Neither could she forbid it when Donnie, Saturday after Saturday, from henceforth quite deserted his town companions for the country walk, and went off directly morning school was over, away up the country-side with Rob (who was often waiting for him), to spend long glorious afternoons in the woods of Obriachan, and to take his supper with the gipsies round the big log fire.

He belonged to them; they were his people. Jeanie could not deny it; nor did she feel it right to use authority to keep him from going near them at all.

He was theirs more than hers, indeed; although

she had brought him up and earned his lifelong gratitude by the devotion of many years.

But she was full of fears for him ; and she often expected, indeed, that he would announce to her some evening, when he came back from their woodland camp, that he *could* not face hard work and the life of restriction in the mill or in the town ; and that he must away with his gipsy relations when they left the Darroch in November, and that he pined to cast in his lot with theirs.

They did not try, however, to persuade him to leave her, nor did they make any claim upon the possession of him against hers.

One Sunday, indeed, the old grandmother came in to see her, travelling to the town's end in the covered cart, and hobbling down Tomnahurich Street to the Little Green corner, assisted by Robin and by her tall son Jim. But she had not come to say that she wanted Donnie ; only that she knew, by her tribe's laws, that she might claim him if it was her will. But she did not do so.

Perhaps Jeanie's grave, quiet face, softened her old heart by the gentle maternal expression of concern

with which she regarded Donnie. And perhaps the old grandame had seen so many of these wild young lives lived out—and lived to destruction—about her in the brown tents and woodland shelters of the gipsy camp, that she felt, in spite of herself, that it were well to leave this boy—this son of her own beloved and first-born—in the safe haven of the cosy wee home to which fate and fortune had wafted him already.

So from the gipsies Jeanie had no alarm of being robbed of her boy. Her fears were from his own nature, and from the restless wandering characteristics she had observed in him for long.



CHAPTER XI.

DISENCHANTMENT.

AT first, indeed, the gipsy life and the companionship of the gipsy people, and especially of his black-eyed cousin Robin Raffe, seemed fairly to bewitch him. He did not seem as if he could keep himself at home.

Jeanie travelled backwards and forwards, as of old, from the Green to her mill-work day by day. And often, as she came down the river-side, she would think of the first years when the wee laddie would be standing knee-deep in the water, with his head wrapped in the crimson sunset, as she came down the way. And often she longed that she had him as a little ragged fellow again, waiting at home for her, or meeting her by the river in the gloaming as she hurried along.

And it seemed as if he had drifted far already from the little quiet centre of her humble life, as she came back, night after night, to eat her own frugal supper, and knew, by the empty ingel-neuk and the two plates and mugs lying upon the wooden table, that the lads had been in long ago, and had had their porridge, and were away now together—wandering somewhere about the town.

And Donnie changed, indeed, under all this new influence, but—the change was, not quite what one would expect!

He changed successively in different ways. He went through several alterations during those weeks—in his inmost views and feelings. And the chief, in fact, the only result was, as far as Jeanie could see, that he gradually became graver and more reserved and quiet.

At first he was quite bewitched with them all; and at night, when at last he came in—to find Jeanie sitting wearily awaiting him by the fire—he would keep her sitting yet an hour before he scrambled up the rickety stairs to his little bed in the low attic—keep her while he poured out his confidences, his

revelations, and all his wonderful stories of the Raffles.

The picturesque, external beauty of that gipsy-life in that lovely corner of the country, in those golden harvest days, made a poet of the rough, untaught boy, as he watched them and felt the whole scene fascinate him to an incomprehensible degree.

It seemed as the perfection of existence to him, to sit round a crackling fire, as the pot boiled and bubbled and sent forth its comfortable and tempting odour; to see the blue smoke curl up among the tree tops, and watch the sunset fall in rich red lights across the brown clusters of low tents; to lie and sleep in the moonlight with nothing but the branches with their delicate network and their rustling leaves between him and the blue spangled sky; to rise in the morning as the day broke; to plunge in the running burn among the weeds and the grey moss-grown stones; and to wander the livelong day, and round all the year, in wild scenes of woodland and rugged mountain beauty, from country to country, from end to end of the land.

It seemed a dream of perfection to him, and the

gipsy-camp in the Darroch drew him constantly from the town.

This was at first—and for these weeks the fascination and delight of it all, took possession of him. He had no room left for any other thought or care.

And Jeanie could only sigh and murmur—"Eh, but bluid's thicker nor water; can I winder at the lad?" And she could only pray and trust—as hard as trust she could—that no mischief might come of it, and that amid all the evil which she knew too well dwelt in the brown tents of the Raffes' encampments her boy might be kept safe and true.

"Donnie's a gude lad," she said a thousand times to herself. "He kens gude frae evil, and darkness frae licht. But, eh! he's but a laddie, and sair taken up. May the Lord hae a thocht for him, for it's a terrible fire o' evil that he's led to pass through. May no ill come nigh him, and may the flames no kindle upon his head!"

She could only fear and pray for him, and do her own day's work from week to week, as the autumn went on. And she hoped—as she prayed and had

strong confidence for Donnie—that all would yet be well with him in spite of everything.

As the time passed she noted the change in him ; and saw, too, that it was not the change she had feared.

The boy did not grow more restless, nor indeed the least rebellious, under her gentle rule. But he grew quieter, and said less about the Raffes, and seemed altogether aged in the course of these autumn weeks—more self-contained and reserved.

For indeed, within his young heart a strange experience of one of life's bitterest lessons was going on all unknown to Jeanie !

The witching illusion and fascination which the Raffes—his own father's people—had at first for him, lasted, alas, only a little while.

Ah ! that bright beauty of their woodland lives. That soft poetry with which (although he did not call it so within himself) the whole scene of their encampment and the romance of his discovery of them had been invested, floated gradually away ; and instead came a slow, painful recognition of what were their real characters and lives.

Rough speech and angry oaths, and bitter wrangling, and often fierce and sudden blows, rose all about him when they got a little used to his presence; and all taught him that—though ever ready with rough and kindly welcome for him, their young kinsman—the Raffes as a community were neither good-hearted nor kind.

And the pretty little scene of the encampment, as it first appeared to him, seemed a thing to remember—for he did not see it in the same light long!

Beyond this, he was soon pained by another realisation which came forcing itself upon him, quite irresistibly, after a time. What did the Raffes live upon? and what, by day, and night time also, did they do? They were careful. They were, in a way, industrious; for they mended old pots and pans, and the women wove chairs and baskets of rough wicker-work, and mats of the long, dried river reeds. And they carried these from door to door—and told fortunes when they could not sell; and the men tramped about and did odd jobs of many a kind, and were soon well known as handy workmen about the place.

But all this did not keep that big pot supplied, evening after evening, with fat chickens and savoury game; with huge laughing potatoes, and leeks and cabbage, and vegetables of every kind.

Nor did they buy (anywhere that Donnie heard or knew of) sundry little articles of raiment and luxury, of which he saw them gradually acquire possession during their residence in the Darroch wood.

They got them, all and everything—food, clothing, boots, and knives (of which Rob never seemed to have a sufficient number), and hats and jackets, and every sort of domestic object which they seemed to require—they got them all in a peculiar way of their own, which at first it was difficult to understand.

Gradually, alas! Donnie understood it. Gradually it broke upon him—and at length he knew. He recognised things, indeed, and could have traced them easily to their first possessors.

He knew the very woman in the town to whom a certain gaudy bonnet belonged, which Bell Sprat his own father's sister, brought home in triumph and with much merriment one day. He saw Jim, his stalwart uncle, and Rob's parent and chief instructor

in the special way he should go, harness "Neddy," the brown donkey, with a long leather bracing which he felt certain he recognised as having belonged to Mr. Fraser of the Aird. He saw many a little thing,—and it all broke upon him by bitter degrees.

They were careful, and they were strangers in the country round,—this gang of Raffes. And they watched warily their opportunities, knowing they must not stay too long. And they went far and wide, stretching their depredations over extensive areas and in different ways.

As the dawn broke on one of those lovely autumn mornings, they would breakfast hastily together round the big log fire. Then away they would go—leaving only the old grandmother and the small babies, and a few mischievous boys and girls to beg on the road above the Darroch and to keep the fire up, and have the pot boiling at night—when they all came home.

And Jim, and Rob, and Bell, and Kate Ginger, and the rest—some with donkeys and tin pans a-jingling, some with baskets and a baby, perhaps,

to excite interest and compassion—would all scatter long distances away from one another, going far and wide.

Bell Spratt would wander up the lochside to Drumnadrochit. Jim would go jingling his pots and pans towards the town. Kate Ginger would strike across the hill towards the Aird even, walking many a rough, weary mile. And all the others would go here and there, taking different routes and paying their unfavoured visits to different farm-houses and different homesteads day by day.

They none of them came back empty-handed—and, indeed, many a queer thing they brought. And often round the crackling logs merry jokes and loud laughter rang, as they told one another odd tales of their own prowess in theft or deception, and of the folly and confiding belief of many a cherry-cheeked dairymaid, or buxom and superstitious farmer's wife.

The police were not very sharp upon these vagrants, perhaps, in those bygone days. And as their pilferings were not extensive in any one direction, people let them alone a good deal—philosophi-

cally taking for granted that they were born to steal!

And save in the case of a fray, and that a serious one, with injury amounting to assault or threatened manslaughter, between a gipsy and any lad of the country or town, they were rarely interfered with at all. The police were shy of following them to their encampments, or of penetrating the fastnesses of the Darroch, or of Culloden Moor, or Clachnaharry Rocks, in search of maid-servants' bonnets left carelessly about for them, or for a credulous "gudewife's" fat hen.

The gipsies pursued their small depredations unmolested for some weeks. And Donnie saw Rob gradually possess himself of sundry strange articles, indeed, which he himself had known in other hands.

People saw the two boys together day after day—the tall black-eyed gipsy with his vagrant, good-for-nothing look; and Jeanie Nairn's laddie, with his graceful, restless ways, with those big dark eyes of his that declared him one of those woodland people, and yet with the brown curly locks, and douce kindly speech, that had come to him

from other ancestors than these tent-born Raffes from strange southern lands.

People were sorry for Jeanie, and shook their heads and said, "What's in a lad will oot in time!" And many a grave prophecy was made, indeed, along the river and on the Green, that "Jeanie would hae a sair hairt yet for the shelter she had gien in her hame and in her kindness to the bonnie bairnie o' that wild cousin o' hers." A cousin, certainly, and "ane o' her ain, to be sure"—but a girl who had never promised well.

People saw it all, and people wondered what would come of it. And Mr. Maclaren well-nigh gave up Donnie and Jeanie Nairn altogether at this time, as obstinate and hopelessly perverted "beyond a' counsel indeed."

But what could Jeanie do,—as she often murmured to herself? What, but wait and pray for her lad, and keep a cosy and bright hearth for him when he came wandering home to her? And give him never a word but cheery kindness, and never a moment that was not a happy one by her fireside?

She waited, and she watched the lad as the

autumn weeks went on—and she saw how much the bright boy changed.

Poor Donnie! His mind was slowly awakening all this time, and within his proud young heart, new feelings and new sorrows were being rapidly born.

It all grew upon him at last,—the full realisation of what his father's people were. And it was a terrible thought to him.

He had loved them instantly and enthusiastically. He had understood their warm eager natures, and had felt at once happy and strangely at home by that woodland fire. And to Rob, his big vagrant cousin, his heart had opened and warmed with that intense glow of eager devotion with which a first ardent friendship springs in a romantic nature into life.

He was devoted in two days to Rob; admiring his strength and his boldness, wondering over his aptness for so many things, and over his vast knowledge of life. The strong dominant spirit swayed him completely, and he adored Rob with all his enthusiastic young heart and soul. He was so proud to be his cousin; and altogether at the first

he was so pleased with this group of wild woodland people, who lived as he longed to live, and who, he learnt, were in reality his own.

Until the veil fell. Then—poor Donnie! All the romance of it fled away. His was an honest and perfectly candid nature. A lie or a theft would have been impossible to Donnie at any time of his life. Moreover, he had not had all Jeanie's sweet beautiful lessons read out to him on those happy Sundays of his childhood in vain, by any means; nor had he been the favourite recipient of all the fine old Black Soldier's views of chivalry and honour for nothing. Donnie had a very high ideal, indeed.

Thus it was all most terrible to him—the destruction of that first fair dream of his young life. Several stages of strong feeling, indeed, very bitterly possessed him. And all those weeks, while he was passing through them, something kept him silent even to Jeanie upon what he had discovered, and on what he suffered and felt.

For a great horror possessed him by degrees; and a dark bitter shame when he thought that

these were his people, his own father's brethren and tribe; and that he, Donald Raffe,—who had held his head high among them all on the Green, who had been a favourite and a sort of hero among the young ones there—something foreign and quite different from themselves,—came of a race whom, if they only knew it, he thought they would hate and despise him for belonging to.

A race not of wild, romantic, free men of the mountains and of the woods; but of low, lying, and thieving creatures, who, beneath their bold brows and black eyes, hid meanness and deception of the most despicable and evil kind.

Men and women were of his father's people who stole from the poor, and the suffering; who boasted of their cruel depredations to one another, often forgetting that he was there.

With the knowledge of it all, this terrible shame possessed Donnie, and also that new strange reserve and pride. They were his, in spite of all; they belonged to him, and he was one of them. They had opened their camp circle to admit him, and he felt, in spite of himself, that he indeed belonged

to them more than to any other community in the place.

The full realisation of all this brought that strange new pride and reserve. He resolved he would bear all his bitter knowledge of them alone. He would shelter their names, he thought. He would keep their confidence (since they had given it to him). He would be silent about his father's people even to Jeanie herself.

So he went among them and came back to her little home again, saying nothing, but aged indescribably by this new and strange experience, and by all his unuttered and heart-felt pain.

That was the first winter of the Crimean War. People's minds, even up North, among the unlearned and unlettered who read few newspapers and knew little of foreign affairs, were full of the excitement and agitation of the times.

Highland regiments had gone out carrying many brave lad well known in the town along with them; and as troops began to be raised in all directions, and as the corps, so sadly thinned, were filled by enlistment from the rustic militia, and from

among the labourers at the anvil or the plough—recruiting sergeants began to appear up the Ness side, and at the farms and workshops all the country round.

Gay and hearty fellows, with a winning way, who carried the siege of Her Majesty's shilling into many a cottage home.

Donnie was watching, with Rob by his side, a group round a recruiting sergeant on the Exchange by Clachnacuddin one afternoon, watching in a dreamy kind of way that had lately grown upon him.

Rob had but lately joined him, having waited for him, and caught him as he came home from school.

As the boys stood and watched and listened to the loud tones of the sergeant, who, with much laughter and rallying of the group around him, offered the bright new shilling to all who would come and take it, Donnie suddenly felt a strong hand laid upon his shoulder, and looked up to see the grimy, kindly countenance of his old friend the black Water-Bailie, gazing down upon him with a quizzical and inquiring air.

"Weel," the old fellow said, "are ye goin' to tak'

the shullin'? Eh, what!" he continued, glancing with an unfavouring eye towards Rob, "is it a braw sodger o' yer countrie and Her Majesty ye're goin' to be, or a vagrant gipsy lad? What are ye thinkin' about it, my man, the now?"

"I dinna ken what I'm goin' to be," said Donnie gravely, while Robin burst into a loud laugh.

Then the sergeant, seeing the two tall and well-grown lads standing there, with the stalwart and straight-drilled old soldier between them, shouted out—

"Come along, my hearties, you're made to serve the Queen in gay red coats, if ever two chaps were, I'll warrant that! Come, you're not chicken-hearted, neither one nor t'other of ye; and I'll be sorry for the old Russian bear if he gets anywhere out yonder within your reach. Come along, my two brave young Highlanders; here's a bright new shilling for you apiece."

Robin laughed loud and long again, and Donnie shook his head gravely and turned silently away.

The sergeant called after them and shouted noisily—

“What! showing the white feather already, my strapping young fellows, are you? That is a pity for yourselves and for the Queen! Well, here are your shillings safe in my pocket, at all events, and when you think better of it you can find me out. If I ain’t on the streets for the next week or two, at least you know your way to Fort George.”

And Donnie walked slowly homewards with the words still ringing in his ears, and the thought borne in strongly upon his mind, “I wonder shall I be a sodger?”

Indeed, it did not then occur to him for the first time!



CHAPTER XII.

THE BIG MARKET.

A FEW days after this came the "Feeing Market," an important and exciting event.

It was the largest market of the year, and people crowded into Inverness from all sides of the country, until from the bridge-end to near Millburn itself there was scarcely standing room.

All along the Exchange and the High Street stretched rows of gay festive-looking booths, where every sort of thing could be bought for a penny, and where all the savings of every little schoolboy at Bell's or the Academy were spent in the course of the day.

"Cheap Johns," selling knives and scissors, boots and stationery, gold chains and diamond earrings, erected their vans full of tempting wares by the potato scales in Petty Street. Old wives, selling

“gib”—a delectable kind of pale yellow toffy—and “sweeties” of every shape and hue, opened their little stalls from an early hour in the morning ; and others, bearing great baskets of hazel-nuts, or fat chickens, or fresh eggs, sat down along the edges of the pavement, and drove a brisk trade with the passers-by.

Along the street beyond the “Peacock,” and all down Academy Street as well, were the dairy-carts. The horses unharnessed, and the shafts cocked up in the air, or resting on the pavement, while piles of golden winter butter, and huge, splendid “keppochs” of cheese were exposed in vigorous competition for sale or favour from the public, who crowded round the carts in loud discussion, or sauntered from one to the other, intruding their noses into the butter-kegs, and poking the big cheese critically with their sticks.

It was a noisy, curious, and very characteristic scene.

Business of one kind or another—of sale or barter, of disposal of the goods stored in the summer and purchase of the winter’s supply—went on along the

pavement's edge ; while all about and down the town, and in the middle of the streets, were packed close together, treading on each other's heels and backing into one another with many a rough greeting and ejaculation, all the young lads and lasses from the whole country round.

Some had come merely for the "outing," to see the "mairket," and to meet their friends ; but the most of them were seeking places ; ready to "take the fee," and engage for the winter's service with any likely farmer or gudewife who, in their turn, might have come, seeking servants, to the town.

It was the country habit, and not a good one. The "feeing mairket" was a noisy and not very pleasing sight.

But it was picturesque in its way, and very national—at least in those days when the bonnie brown heads of the country girls were still uncovered by gaudy bonnets, and when the tartan plaid and pretty snow-white "mutch" of the elder women might often still be seen. And although, already at that date, a kilt was a rare sight among the farming Highlanders, still the rough tweeds and the shepherd's plaids, and the in-

evitable red bundle slung across the shoulders, or carried under the arm, were characteristic and quite peculiar to the place and scene.

The schools had a half day's play, and schoolboys of every grade were turned loose upon the town at noon. And, with all his class-fellows, Donnie came trooping up the river-side from the Merkinch, full of enterprise for a day's enjoyment, and of curiosity as to all the sights and fun to be seen.

A big menagerie had, of course, arrived the night before and taken up its position by the lower bridge. There was a circus, too, and a booth with a giantess, who excited much enthusiasm in the crowd.

And there, among the rest, were the gipsies, telling fortunes, selling baskets, begging, bullying, and generally persecuting the population, and extracting profit out of every variety of enterprise with amazing skill.

At the top of Kessock Street, Donnie came upon Rob. What he was doing, in the cause of his family's service, was not evident. He had nothing to sell—he was apparently idly loafing about; but he had earned sixpence for holding a gentleman's horse at

the post-office already, and he had acquired property—sundry peculiar pieces of property—in his own peculiar way.

A grave look came into Donnie's eyes as he caught sight of his cousin; and a quick thought rose that he would avoid Rob to-day, and slip home without joining him—that he would not go into the market, even at the sacrifice of missing the sight of the wild beasts at the menagerie, and the enormous lady whose portrait had already excited his curiosity very much indeed.

He would avoid it all, he thought, and slip home and get his fishing-rod, and go up the river-side.

He could not tell why, exactly, but he did not want to be with Rob to-day. However, his cousin caught sight of him.

"Hullo!" he shouted; "whither away so fast? Look out, there, Don! Don't you see me? Come here, old chap; don't be in such a hurry. What's the row?"

Donnie stopped; and Rob, with his hands in his pockets, came towards him.

"Well," he said slowly, "is school up?"

"Ay," said Donnie, "we've half the day o' play."

"Well, come along and play, then, and improve the shining hour. There's lots of capital fun going on over there. Come across the bridge, and let us take a stroll about the town."

"I'm wantin' my denner," said Donnie. "I'm awa' hame to get it the now. Will ye come in and hae a tatie along wi' me, Rob? I'm sure that Jeanie has left a' ready for the twa o' us the day."

"Oh, bother! never mind your dinner. Come along into the town. I've got a handful of browns already this morning, and a sixpence too. Come away up the street among the booths and the Jacks, Don, and I'll treat ye to some dinner as we go along."

And Robin put his arm through Donnie's, and drew the younger lad along, still half hesitating, still uncertain, but going somehow, as he usually did, just along with Rob.

Across the bridge and up the sloping street, past the old jail tower, and into the very midst of the confusion and the crowd.

There was lots to amuse the boys, and Donnie be-

came interested, and soon forgot that he had not meant to come at all to the market that day.

Rob squeezed in and out among the people, having some lively, impertinent speech to make to all—talking right and left to everybody within hail of him, and making his way with an energy and indifference that amused Donnie immensely as he came along behind.

The crowd was so great, and so close packed, that they had to walk one in front of the other, and the people never moved or made way for anybody at the “mairket.” But still Rob always managed to push his way.

He bought pocketsful of gingerbread and cakes, too, at the stalls; became possessed also of other eatables in some unaccountable way. And so they did not suffer from hunger, although they never went home to the Green to dinner, but went wandering about the crowded streets, among the booths and the Cheap-Jacks, and the cheese and butter carts, the whole live-long day.

It grew dark early, however, and the crowd began to scatter by three o'clock.

The butter-carts were packed up and re-harnessed. The booths were covered and closed in, to linger another day. The Cheap-Johns hung lights round their vans, and shouted louder than ever, and gathered larger crowds. And people trooped in, "half-price" now, to the giantess and the menagerie, whose owners began to make money fast when the serious day's work was near its end.

Alas! other places filled as well, too—the whisky-shops and the public-houses. They were brightly lit up, and they looked tempting and warm.

There were no workmen's clubs, nor coffee-palaces; no such snug retreats for the temperate and well-disposed in the old town in those days; and the harvests gathered on such occasions by the whisky dealers was the chief objection to the "feein' market" on all sides.

At the door of one of these little public-houses just opposite the Clachnacuddin corner, at the foot of the Castle Wynd, was the recruiting sergeant—a gay and central figure, exciting lively interest this afternoon.

He had long and bright-hued ribbons waving from

his trim foraging cap, and he rang out many a cheery greeting and merry joke in his loud voice, which attracted attention from every one, and arrested many a saunterer by his side.

He had had fair success to-day, and was going back to Fort George with a handsome train of stalwart young Highlanders behind him.

He had stirring news to tell too, and people lingered to listen.

That was a burning hour in the country's history: the troops lay encamped amid the gathering winter's snows in the Crimea; and battles had been already fought, and enthusiasm already ran high in the cause of the soldier and for success to the country's arms.

Donnie and Rob paused once more, as they had done many a day lately, to listen to the sergeant's tale.

"Come along, my hearties," he was shouting right and left. "Who's for the shilling? Here it is, bright and new! with Her Majesty's image on't, enough to inspire patriotism in every brave heart. Who'll away to fight the Rooshians and win honour

and glory, instead of turning the sod like beasts of burden at home? Here, you, my fine fellow,—and you,” turning to another, “and you, and you, and you! You were all born, my strapping lads, to wear the braided red coat, and no doubt to win the epaulet too, and bring home medals—fine glittering medals—to your sweethearts, by next summer-time. Come away,—who’ll along with me? There’s a steamer to sail next Tuesday fortnight straight to Portsmouth from Fort George, and the recruits are to go in it, straight to head-quarters—straight to the very front. Come along, my hearties, who’ll go? Come! Victory to the Highlanders! Down with the enemy!—and God save the Queen!”

“Hurrah!” shouted the old Black Soldier, standing close to the sergeant, and furiously waving his stick. “Hurrah!” he shouted. “If I was but a young chap agen, ma word, my gude fellow, ye wadna lave the auld toon without me.”

“Make the youngsters come then,” shouted the sergeant, “and they’ll every one of them sport a medal as you do before they’re a twelvemonth

older,—for that I'll go bail. Come along, who's a-going? Next Tuesday fortnight the *Seraphim* sails."

"Not a bad idea, by Jingo!" exclaimed Rob, laughing derisively as usual. "Come along, Don; ain't you tired of that fellow's shouting? Come on, let's go over the bridge."

"Did you never think to be a sodger, Rob?" said Donnie, as he turned with his cousin down the street.

"Yes, many and many a time I've thought of it," exclaimed Rob, laughing aloud again. "But no,—'gad, there'd be a deal too much bullying and drilling in it for me. My own chancy life suits me better, Don. I take it I'll be a freebooter all my days."

"But I think ye'll come to tak' thocht sometime," said Donnie quietly, as he walked by the bigger lad down towards the bridge. "Eh, Robin, ye'll come to tak' thocht, and I'm sure o't; ye canna ever gae on in yer ways, ye ken."

"Eh, by Jingo! is the little chap going to lecture me? Are you going to turn preacher instead of

soldier, Don? Shut up that, if you please, and take to the red coat and not the black one, my beauty, if you must have one or t'other, at all events."

"I'm no saying naething," said Donnie sadly—"naething to you, Rob,—ane of my ain fayther's people,—it wadna become me to say. But ye'll tak' thocht, laddie; I ken ye'll tak' thocht some day."

"Then I'll come and have the rest of your sermon, perhaps," Rob exclaimed uproariously. "Look here, Donnie, ain't it jolly and black and deep in the big river?"

They had reached the bridge now, and were sauntering slowly across it.

It was a lovely evening, though growing dark. The moon was rising, and bright stars were coming out in the great arch of blue that extended over the old town, over the deep currents of the river, and over the outlines of the distant and surrounding hills.

And as the boys came on to the bridge, the water was rushing, as Rob said, dark and swift below

them, and the soft starlight was gleaming on the bubbles of the stream.

The air was soft and fresh, blowing up from the sea out at the river's mouth. And although it was November, and so early dark, still it was not so cold but that people could saunter and talk in knots together, as they said "good-bye," and as the vast crowd scattered homewards.

The bridge was crowded. Numbers of persons were leaning upon the parapets, and (as they talked to their friends and country neighbours) looking up and down the stream.

Donnie and Rob sauntered and stood about here a little while together, as they had done the whole day long.

Suddenly Donnie perceived an old man who knew him,—no less a person than Sandy Davidson, the chief town's officer—one from whom he had had many a kindness in his early days.

Sandy was standing leaning on his stick, wearing his flat blue cap and his long blue coat. And he was eyeing the two boys with an expression of concern upon his face, as he looked at Donnie

(with less of favour than he used to do in times gone bye); and with an expression of decided disapproval and sharp observation also, as he noted who was Donnie's companion, and with whom he was loitering idly upon the bridge. He seemed to watch the two boys a moment, then he went slowly on.

They pushed through the knots of chattering people and reached the centre of the bridge. The view was fine here, up and down the river,—up to where the circlet of the wooded islands and the green banks of Drummond Braes rose in the soft moonlight—and down towards the sea.

Here a number of people were standing, and among them an old gentleman—also well known to Donnie—a worthy Bailie of the town.

He was a dealer in corn and malt—this old gentleman. And he had done a good bit of business, indeed, that day. He was loitering now, on his way home to Telford Street, and leaning for a moment to look over the bridge, as many others did, down the currents of the rushing stream.

It was Mr. Mactavish, indeed—the chief Bailie, and a fine speaker at the Civic Board,

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He had issued out lately from the Town-Hall upon the crowded Exchange; and as he came out and found the evening chills about to fall, he had encased his portly person in a long greatcoat, which had capacious pockets in the tails behind.

Into this he has put his pocket-book, in a thoughtless moment, indeed; but Mr. Mactavish had met so many "freends" at Clachnacuddin, and had exchanged so many greetings, and had enjoyed so many "cracks," that his pocket-book, which had been used and filled during business in the morning, had gone clean out of his head.

And thus he stood now, leaning thoughtlessly over the bridge, admiring the noble sweep and rush of the grand river in the soft starlight.

And Robin Raffe stood quite close at his elbow, with Donnie, dreamily looking about him, at his side.

Suddenly Donnie was roused by Rob's pushing him.

"Come along!" he said; and he turned to see Rob disappearing amid the knots of people across the bridge.

He lost sight of him; Rob had gone *skimming*

along with amazing speed. He had wound his way, cutting in and out between the groups, and had disappeared—Donnie had not a notion where.

He followed quickly, however. He ran also over the bridge. He whistled, he shouted, "Rob!"

And in two minutes, as he paused, looking up and down along the river's bank on the west side of the bridge—suddenly Rob appeared again. With a shout of "Hullo!" and a loud laugh at Donnie, he appeared from out the dusk and from behind the corner of Tomnahurich Street, where he had been standing a few minutes—alone and unnoticed—quite out of Donnie's sight. He came forward now, and threw his arm over Donnie's shoulder.

"Hullo!" he said. "It was a bit of fun, you know. I wanted to see if you could catch me—so I cut and ran. Come along—come up this way—quick—round the back of Tomnahurich Street. Come on—I'm in a hurry—I want to get out of the town."

"What's yer hurry?" said Donnie. "Ye'll come awa' hame till the Little Green to supper?"

"No, I won't,—not a bit of me," exclaimed Rob, in a curious excited tone. "No, I won't. Look here old chap—you come along instead with me. I'm off, d'ye know—off right away—up the country side. Surely you're a-going to be a gipsy, Donnie? You're a-going to be one of us, ain't you now, my hearty? Come—make up your mind now—once for all."

"I dinna ken, Rob," said Donnie, in a suddenly grave tone. "If so be that ye'd commence to tak' thocht"——

"Oh, come—none of your preaching. I ain't got no time for that! Look here, Don. Once for all—are you coming? No? Well, shut up the preaching, and look here"——

He stopped and turned round upon Donnie—a curious look kindling in his dark eyes in the star-light. He looked a minute at Donnie, then he threw his arm suddenly over the boy's shoulder again, and drew him on.

Donnie was puzzled with his words and manner; but so many thoughts and difficulties, on his own account, springing from Rob's invitation, came up

in his mind at the same time, that he was absorbed. He scarcely noticed how his cousin looked or spoke, or what he did.

Suddenly Rob started. He looked round him with quick flashing eyes. They heard a shout in the distance; what it meant, Donnie could not, for his part, tell.

But Rob seemed to hear it—with strange renewed excitement, and with a curious eager glistening look.

Suddenly he pushed against Donnie, as they stood together in the dim light, and listened and paused. He seemed to give him, too, an odd twist and pull; Don felt him tug oddly at the flap of his loose jacket, and then Rob raised his arm from where it had hung across Donnie's shoulder, as they strolled along. He turned upon his cousin. He flashed one glance into his face.

"Cut and run!" he ejaculated in a low tone.

And then he was gone himself—disappearing into the darkness—skimming over the road, and running along towards the open country, before

Donnie had recovered his surprise at the disappearance, or had stirred from the spot.

"He's a queer lad, Rob," he said at last philosophically to himself; and then he turned and went slowly towards Jeanie's home.



CHAPTER XIII.

ROUND THE PEAT FIRE.

WHEN Donnie reached the little house on the Green, Jeanie had just come in.

It was quite dark now, and the stars were bright in the deep blue sky, as he turned off the road and crossed the threshold into the little room.

Jeanie was blowing up her peat fire, and as Donnie entered, his eyes lit instantly on her bending figure, kneeling upon the hearthstone; on her brown hair, glistening in the fire-flame; and on her soft quiet face, leaning forward to watch the kindling peat.

Jeanie—his dear, ever-kind, protecting mother, Jeanie—how often had he left her in these latter weeks to prepare her frugal supper and to blow up the peat fire alone!

The thought seemed to smite him, somehow, to-

night; and the memory of all that she had done for him, all she had been to him, came rushing over his heart.

He came forward into the fire-glow, and she raised her quiet face.

How worn—work-worn and life-worn—Jeanie looked for her years, as she knelt there.

How soon it tells—how young it brings the burden of years across the brow—that daily monotonous labour of the mill! Jeanie had had a hard-working life of it, this many a year, while she had been “doing” for Donnie; and the stamp of her unwearying labour was on her now.

To-night, somehow, the boy seemed to see it.

He had always been a good boy and a comfort and a help to her in their little home; but he had never borne the burden and the care of life with her.

Until a few months ago, indeed (before the Raffles had appeared in the Darroch), he had seemed merely as a “wee bit o’ a laddie” to her. And since then—since he had seemed to spring into sudden manliness and strength before her—he had evinced also

such independence and self-reliant energy of will, that Jeanie felt the "wee laddie" had gone from her. And the big active boy, who roamed day after day over the country and town with Rob, or who sat silent now, so often, by her hearth, was less a Fraser than a Raffe, indeed, and had energies beyond her power of restriction, and many thoughts beyond her knowledge.

And yet was she fond and proud of him, and she hoped the best for her laddie still.

As he came in to-night, something in her air of weariness seemed to strike him as with a new force. He sprang forward.

"Is it you, Donnie?" Jeanie said, in rather a wondering tone, for she had not expected to see him enter so soon.

"Ay, it's mysel', Jeanie," he answered. "Stop 'til I blow up the fire."

And down he went on his knees in front of the smouldering peat and logs; and Jeanie laughed a little quiet pleased laugh, as she watched him, and as she moved from her place on the hearth to a low stool by his side.

“Eh, but it’s a spry and clever laddie,” she said, as Donnie took up the wood and peats deftly between his fingers, and laid them anew across the hearthstone, blowing up the fire at the same time into a cheery blaze. “Eh, but it’s a clever laddie!”

“That’s the way Uncle Jim Raffie puts the sticks, Jeanie,” he answered, “and I’m thinkin’ it’s a better way nor ours. Now wait a little, till I’ll get the pot, Jeanie, and the wee kettle for your tea.”

He jumped up and seemed eager to serve her, and Jeanie smiled again at him, and folded her arms on her knees in her favourite attitude, and watched him with quiet pleasure.

Donnie hung the round pot on the chimney-hook with a swing and an air, as he had seen the gipsies do; and he filled the little kettle too, and then sat down opposite Jeanie to blow up the flame with the wooden bellows, to watch the fire dance cheerily, and to see the kettle boil.

The flames danced up and illuminated the whole of the little room with its warm light, and Donnie looked round, his large dark eyes wandering over

every familiar object, and lingering over each without knowing why.

He looked at the tall "dresser" with its broad shelves reaching to the low ceiling, covered with the china tea-cups and plates and saucers, of which Jeanie was so justly proud.

His eyes wandered to the big old clock at one end; to the little shelf of books above the old chimney-corner chair; to the bright tin covers and mugs and shining tray, which Jeanie had hung on big nails opposite the window; and on to the red geranium plants, and the bonnie linnet in its swinging cage upon and above the window-sill. All were wrapped in that warm fire-light, and looked cosy and clean and homelike, in their simple humble way,—just as Jeanie herself did, the mistress of all this small dominion wincey of hers, as she sat there over against him, in her skirt and blue-striped jacket, looking into the fire-light with folded arms resting upon her knees.

A wave of memory seemed to rush over Donnie's heart, bringing all his years of bright youth and boyhood along with it. All the old days by the

deep river-side. All the quiet Sundays in the fir-woods, and the cosy winter evenings here by the peat fire.

And as he sat there, and this curious dreamy mood came over him, he looked across at Jeanie and thought—

“How good, how kind, how true” to him she had been. “How different she was from those other wild black-haired women out there in the Darroch. How different from Bell Spratt and Kate Ginger, with their rough tongues and noisy ways; and how different was her life and its standards from theirs!

“How horror-struck would she be if Donnie were to tell her of all he had seen among his father's wild kinsfolk out there. And yet—they *were* his father's! Surely he must be true to them, and honour the confidence they had shown him, and (through everything) shelter their names.

“Even Jeanie should never know the deep disgrace that attached to the Raffes,” he thought sadly. “Nay—Jeanie's proud, fair sense of what was just and right should never be clouded by the knowledge

of that dishonour and ignominy which was attached too truly to the people of her boy."

It was all these thoughts, coming again and again, that had thrown Donnie so completely back upon himself. The sense of so much to conceal. The knowledge of so much that must never pass his lips. The feeling of a debt of honour due to that tribe of his father's people, who had welcomed his father's son among them, as one even of themselves. He would be silent.

But he would be glad, he thought, when the Raffes were fairly gone,—when he would be left to his own quiet old life again, and could turn steadily to think of settled work and a trade. For he must stir himself up, indeed, now, he thought. He was a big lad, and had been long enough at school.

It was time that he was earning some help for Jeanie, and beginning to give her back, as he grew to manhood, all the care and support she had given him through bygone years.

So thought Donnie, especially this evening, as he sat there quietly, and the porridge-pot bubbled up.

And resolve rose strongly within him, as he looked forward to his life.

He would work, and be a son, indeed, to his kind Jeanie for all the years of their life to come. And he would neither tell her, nor any one else, in the world one word of the Raffes nor of their vagrant ways, nor of the disgrace that attached to himself, indeed, as being of their race and family.

The pot bubbled up presently to a brisk boil, and Donnie tumbled in handfuls of meal, and stirred his porridge vigorously with a cheery smile.

And Jeanie rose, and had just taken a jug of milk, and Donnie's big bowl and platter from the wooden shelf, and was setting it down at his usual end of the table—looking pleased and proud and happy this evening at having his company and his help—when there was a sharp knock at the little door, as of a stick struck hurriedly against it, and before Donnie could spring to raise the latch, a voice called—

“Are ye in, Jeanie Nairn, are ye in?”

“It's Sandy Davidson!” said Donnie, with a glance of surprise at Jeanie, and pausing an instant in astonishment before he opened the door.

“The sheriff’s officer!” said Jeanie, with a mild surprise in her eyes also, and with a sudden deep flush upon her cheek. “What can he be wantin’ here? Open the door, Donally, open the door.”

Donnie raised the latch, and there stood the old town’s officer, in his long blue coat and flat cap—leaning heavily upon his stick as usual, and glancing, with grave concern in his eyes, into the fire-lit room.

“Come in, if ye please, Mister Davidson; come in,” said Jeanie, respectfully, with a welcoming gesture, as she stood by Donnie at the open door.

The old man came slowly forward, out of the darkness, into the warm-lit room.

He glanced round upon the simple homelike scene,—at the smoking porridge-pot bubbling above the peats; at the deal table, with its simple service of blue willow-pattern deft; at the brown tea-pot cosily nestled in the peat embers; at the linnet sleeping softly on its perch, and the red geranium flowering on the low window-sill; and then at Jeanie, with her comely figure and gentle face; and at the

tall bonnie boy, her "laddie," who with his brown curls glistening in the fire-light, and his large dark eyes looking fearlessly into the officer's face, stood upright by Jeanie's side—still holding the door open with one rough sunburnt hand.

He was a fine fellow—well-grown and lithe and stalwart; with that suspiciously gipsy look about him, in his rich warm-tinted colouring; and yet with that untroubled look too, in his face, and in the brave bright eyes, which rested fearlessly, with surprise and question, upon Sandy Davidson.

The old man knit his forehead, and looked out fearsomely from under his shaggy eyebrows into the lad's face. He shook his head; and at last—he fairly groaned!

"What is it, Mister Davidson?" said Jeanie wonderingly. While Donnie said nothing. Only the memory came back to him—with a curious and sudden chill to his very heart it came—the memory of where and when he had last seen old Sandy Davidson.

It was that very afternoon, on the bridge, in the soft starlight of the gloaming, as he and Rob had

stood together close to Bailie Mactavish, and as he had himself turned to lean over the parapet and watch the dark eddying stream.

Sandy Davidson had passed close to them, and had glanced at him and at Rob also, as he remembered, with no favouring eye.

And yet Sandy Davidson had been a friend of his in the old days. Ah! how many looked coldly on him now, he thought, since it was realised that he belonged to the Raffes.

And yet—must he not be true to his people, and to his father's kith and kin? The boy's proud young sensitive soul was stung on all sides, and suffered many different pangs and pains through all this. And it altogether seemed to rush over him now, as he stood there and held open the cottage door, and old Sandy Davidson stood and glowered and frowned upon him.

"What's yer will, Mister Davidson?" asked Jeanie at length. "Will ye be tellin' us yer will, if ye please? Or may be ye'll come in and tak' a chair by the fire, and a cup o' tea? Ye're kindly welcome—will ye no step in?"

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Sandy Davidson once more most fearsomely shook his head.

"It's no a welcome I'm lookin' for frae you, Jeanie Nairn," he said solemnly, "and I'm sair puttin aboot, indeed, wi' the business that I come to do. But duty maun come afore a' things, and I maun do my duty to the Queen's Majesty, and to the dignity o' the law; although I'm sair puttin aboot, I can tell ye, woman, and wad walk to Beaully rayther than to spak the words I hae to say the nicht."

"What's yer will, if ye please, sir?" was still all Jeanie could say.

She was surprised and perplexed at the old man's words, but no possible explanation of them reached her at all as yet.

"I maun do my duty," he said, "to the majesty o' the law, and to Bailie Mactavish. And I hae here, Jeanie Nairn and Donall Raffe, my warrant for what I do."

He drew forth as he spoke a blue ominous-looking paper from his pocket—at the sight of which Jeanie, indeed, turned pale.

"A warrant, Mister Davidson! a warrant! And

what for wad ye be comin' wi' sich a thing to my door?"

"To your door, and to your house, Jeanie Nairn—sorry as I am to bring it. I've got it here—a warrant o' search and arrest; if from search we can learn onything o' the pairty *or* pairties who took Bailie Mactavish's pocket-book from the tails o' his ain topcoat, upon the bridge o' Inverness, at the hour of four, or thereabouts, this afternoon. Eh, Jeanie, I'm puttin aboot," added the old man, "but I maun search the pairties. There was ten poonds in the Bailie's pouch the day. He had got it in the morn for a sale o' seed-corn, that he had made at the mairket, wi' a farmer oot o' Easter Ross. Eh, Jeanie, I'm puttin aboot, indeed. But ye maun gie me an answer, Donall Raffe—whaur did I see ye last, wi' my ain twa een, laddie, at four o'clock o' this afternoon?"

"I see'd ye on the bridge," said Donnie quietly; but his cheek, like Jeanie's, had grown white, and there was a strange deep fire in his dark eyes. "I see'd ye."

"And wha was standin' nigh-hand, quite close?"

"Bailie Mactavish ; I see'd him too," said Donnie. "He was a speirin' alongside o' me intil the river, when I looked over the bridge. The stars were that bonnie on the black water, scarce a body could pass over without gi'en a glint their way."

"Ay, ay," said old Sandy eagerly, quite pleased with the cool manner in which Donnie helped towards the evidence which he wished to make clear. "Ay, ay, there ye was a-standin', laddie, and yon gipsy thief alongside o' you. And the Bailie was speirin' intil the river, without seeing either one or the other. Eh, Donnie, spak up like a man, now, and gie us a clear aividence. You was a-standin', and alongside o' ye was the gipsy lad. And whaur is he now, I'm askin' ye? And whaur is the Bailie's pouch, and his cheques, and his papers, and his gude ten poonds?"

"I canna tell ye that, sir," said Donnie. But there was a blanched and stricken look in his countenance, that seemed to belie his words.

"Ye canna tell! Ye *winna* tell, ye mean," said the old officer angrily. "Then, my bonnie laddie, ye maun jist come awa' wi' me. Here is the warrant

o' arrest and search—wi' the sheriff's name wrote on it wi' his ain han'. And ye maun e'en jist spak and gie us a clear aividence; or I maun search the bit hoosie, and ye're ain corporial pershon—and ye maun come awa'."

"Ye can search yer will," said Jeanie, with a quiet dignity at this point. But the palor and grey shadow deepened upon her face also, as upon Donnie's; for although they two could stand there, with conscience clear as the day, before the law and all its dire official menace, still—the same thought must have come bitterly to both of them—they knew of others who might not be so clear.

If the Bailie's pouch was taken from his coat-pocket at that hour in the afternoon, when Rob and Donnie Raffe had stood together on the bridge, by his side, in the gloaming there—then some one, no doubt, had taken it. And if so, WHO?

Donnie shivered as he felt surely that he knew too well.

And with the feeling, came all the old thoughts that had been possessing him, with their pain and perplexity, for all these bygone weeks. His pride

about his father's people. His reserve as to their character and their habits. His shame at his connection with them. His proud and chivalrous sense of a certain debt he owed to them—of loyalty on his part, and of—silence!

There might have been right or wrong in his notion; and a false sense of his duty in his standard of honour. But his mind was made up. In the two quick passing moments that he stood there, and Sandy Davidson eyed him suspiciously—his mind was made up, and he spoke not one single word.

"I maun search the house and yersels," said the old man, resolutely, at length. "The pouch o' Bailie Mactavish must be hidden some place or anither—it's the Lord alone kens whaur! But investigation in the cause o' jistice is but the duty and the prerogative o' the law."

With that he glanced round the room, and then back at Donnie, who stepped in towards him and gravely closed the door.

Old Sandy laid his hand on Donnie's shoulder, and put his stick under one arm. He said nothing

further, but as the lad stood upright before him, he put his horny hand into one of his jacket-pockets.

"It's a form," he said quietly. "Dinna ye greet, Jeanie Nairn woman, I'm no thinkin' yer laddie is a thief. But if he'll no spak and assist us, we maun jist gae forward ceremawniously, and e'en gether aividence for oorsels."

He took a quantity of curious objects out of Donnie's pocket as he spoke: a ball of twine, a handful of marbles, a new knife from the market, and a "fairing" he had bought for Jeanie, and had forgotten, as yet, to give to her—a pair of blue turquoise earrings, which, for twopence, he had purchased from the Cheap-John.

Donnie's left-side pocket was a study for Sandy Davidson, that was perplexing and took time. He bent towards the peat-fire flames, holding the queer collection of things together in his hand. But there was no trace of Bailie Mactavish's property to be found among them; and even the turquoise earrings might have been bought for Jeanie's "fairing" without touching much of the change of the Bailie's ten pounds.

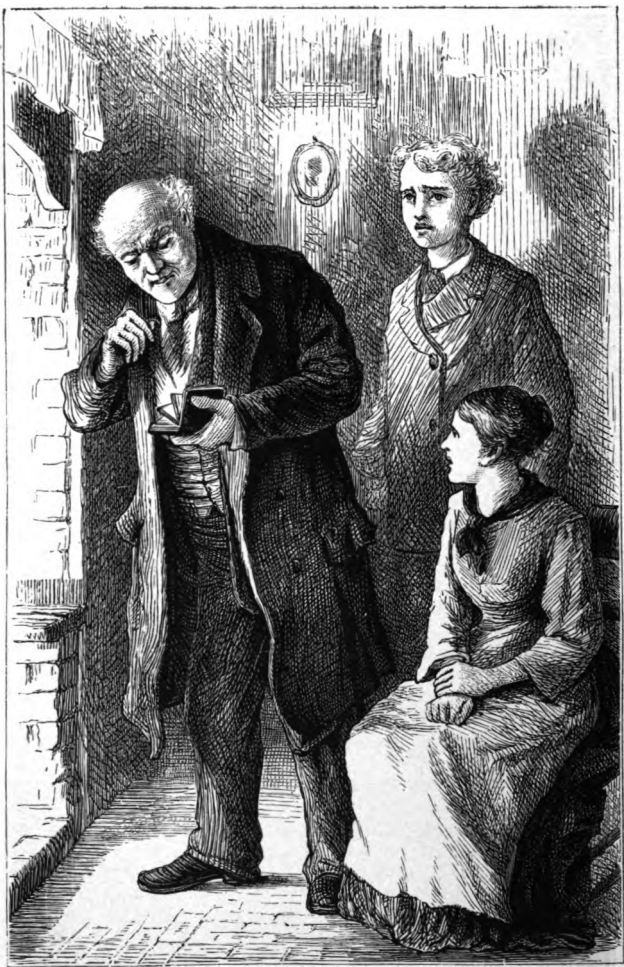
The old officer put the handful of Donnie's treasures down upon the table in a heap together, and turned to the boy again.

A deep flush of shame, and a flash too of scorn for those who insisted upon suspecting him, coloured the lad's cheek now, and gleamed from his dark eyes. But he stood still and submissive, and said not a single word.

He had thrown his head up, with a curious gesture too, and he folded his arms; but it did not seem to occur to him to feel in his own pockets, or either to resist or to assist Sandy Davidson in his search. So the old man went on.

In the waistcoat-pockets was more string and a bit of pencil; a carpenter's foot-measure too, made with hinges and folded small; a broken Jew's-harp, which he had got also at the Feeing Market; and a couple of halfpennies that remained, as all his riches, after the day spent among the many temptations of the booths.

In his inner jacket-pocket, when Sandy Davidson thrust his hand into the lad's breast, was a paper of fishhooks and some tangled line; and a book



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also—a dog-eared, much-soiled work upon military life and on the many victories of the British arms—which he had long ago got as a present from the Black Soldier, and which was almost the only book, indeed, that Donnie cared to study in his idle hours.

Sandy Davidson, still grunting and shaking his head, laid all these objects down on the table, with the marbles and the turquoise earrings. They might be needed in the “aividence”—for all Sandy knew.

And then once more he plunged his hand into Donnie’s right-hand jacket-pocket, and from it he drew—*something*—which caused an irrepressible exclamation to break from Jeanie’s blanched lips, and from the boy himself.

For it was something, indeed, which neither of them had ever seen before. It was a pocket-book, an undoubted pocket-book, and it came forth from Donnie’s pocket, held fast in Sandy Davidson’s relentless grasp.

“My conscience!” the old man exclaimed. “Are my eyes decaiving me! This is never the Bailie’s money-pouch, Donall Raffe?”

"I dinna ken," said Donnie firmly, but in a low and awestruck tone of voice. "I dinna ken."

"Ye dinna ken? But the law will ken, laddie—and the jidges will ken—and the Sheriff—and the majesty o' the state. Is Bailie Mactavish, dacent man, to lose ten poonds o' his hairvest earnin's, and to git nae satisfawction frae law, nor state, nor yersel' neither, but jist that ye 'dinna ken'? Whaur did ye git this pocket-book, my fine fellow? And how d'ye come wi' a pouch in yer pocket, wi' the Bailie's own name upon it, on the very strap? Eh, but it's a bad job, Jeanie—here is the Bailie's pocket-book, and nae mistake."

He glanced round upon her, as she stood silent, with pale cheeks, beside them. Old Sandy gazed from one to the other of them, as he still held Donnie all unresisting by his collar.

Donnie did not in the least resist him. He stood still and silent and patient as the old officer hovered on; only the lad's eyes turned now, and rested on Jeanie's face.

A curious change had come over Jeanie. She did not burst into any agony of sorrow or of appre-

hension at this strange sight she saw—over the thought of Donnie held a prisoner in the grasp of justice, and of the thing he had apparently stolen, in the officer's very hand. She did not show her heart-stricken fear and anguish by any outburst of open woe. But she raised her head as he had done, and quietly she met the lad's glance. She looked proud and silent as he did, and as old Sandy went on, she also spoke no word.

"I canna mak' it oot—I canna mak' it oot"—the old fellow was now saying. "Ye was aye a douce and dacent lad, though a bit o' a randy. How iver could it come over ye to tak' the Bailie's pouch?"

"I didna tak' it," said Donnie quietly.

"Ye didna tak' it! And wha then? Eh, but, laddie, dinna be prood and wilful now. Gae doon on yer knees to the Sheriff and the Bailie—and gie up the pocket-book intil his hand. And if it's a' richt, and the money's safe in't, as nae doot it be—wha kens but the Bailie may look over it, and the Sheriff get ye a free pairdon frae the Queen. Wha kens—they may conseeder it, laddie, and mind on the wild bluid that ye come o'; and that it's

the first offence. And ye may get time for repentance o't yet. I canna mak' it oot—when I mind ye a wee laddie, Donall—how iver ye cam' to tak' the Bailie's pouch?"

"I never took it," said Donnie sadly, "and mair nor that I canna say. I never took it; Jeanie, I never took it," he suddenly repeated with a ring of pathos in his voice as he turned to her.

"I never thocht, for a stroke o' the clock, my laddie, that ever ye did," she proudly replied.

"And wha then?" cried the officer angrily; for neither did he even now think that Donnie had taken it—only that he had been, perhaps, an unwilling accomplice, helping Rob.

But if Donnie would not help him now, what could be done? He must act on the "aividence" as it came to hand.

Suddenly he turned towards the fire—letting go the boy, who showed no symptom of escaping—and, bending his grey head towards the light, Sandy opened the pocket-book. He fumbled hastily over the papers, and shoved his fingers between the leaves, and then—a deep exclamation of renewed

horror and wrath broke from him, and he looked up with fiery glances of anger in his keen old eyes.

“Eh! may the Lord forgie ye, and veesit His chastisement upon the head where it is due! Oh, the puir Bailie!—the honest, dacent man—how will I face him now? And what hae I to tak’ back to him? If this is his pouch—and nae doot but it is—there’s no a penny o’ money in it, frae end to end!”

It was too true,—every farthing of the Bailie’s money was gone.

The ten pounds in Caledonian Bank notes, which the farmers had that morning given him, and the handful of loose change as well, which he had carried in his pocket, from several small transactions, and after sundry “fairings” bought and exchanged.

Poor Jeanie! and poor, proud-hearted Donald! The discovery was a terrible blow for them, indeed; and an irrepressible utterance of dismay and horror broke from both their white lips. And Jeanie sat down on the stool in the chimney-corner, and threw her apron over her face.

“This is a serious matter, now,” said old Sandy,

"and I canna tell at a' whaur it'll end. Eh, Jeanie, mak' the lad spak up to me. Hae ye nothin', boy, nothin' agin sich an awfu' imputation to say?"

Donnie shook his head. But it did not seem for the moment as if he had anything to say. A dazed and painful look came into his eyes, but still he did not utter one word.

"Ye maun come awa' wi' me, laddie," said old Sandy at last. "Angus Scott and Robert Carr, the town's policemen, are awaitin' me roun' the corner o' the Green, and ye maun come betwixt the twa o' them, my lad—though, in truth, it wasna yersel' that we were lookin' to tak'. Eh, my man," he continued suddenly, "won't ye spak a word that will maybe put yersel' in the richt? Eh, laddie, it was frae anither's han', and na frae the Bailie's topcoat tails, that ye took this pouch the day. Ye canna gie the lie to that opinion, Donall Raffe; and o' that I'm sure, whatever."

"I dinna ken," said Donnie, shaking his head again; "I didna get yon pouch frae the han' o' any one at all. 'Deed I ken naething—and I can say naething mair."

"Aweel, aweel, ye maun come awa' wi' me, my lad. And I maun e'en call Angus Scott and Robert Carr to tak' ye in chairge. And I'm sair puttin aboot to be the ane to do't—the Lord kens that o' me, Jeanie Nairn. And ye canna misdoot it o' me, yer ainsel'."

"I'm no misdootin'," said Jeanie, from behind her apron's veil. "Ye war ever a gude freend, Mister Davidson, to my laddie and me."

"And ye're no misdootin' *me*!" said Donnie wistfully. "Eh, Jeanie, ye ken weel enough—I needna say't—I didna tak' the Bailie's pouch at a'."

"I ken it weel, laddie," she murmured. "I'm no misdootin' ye. But oh! I'm thinkin' my hairt's fair broke in twa."

Donnie paused and looked at her. A moment his resolve seemed to waver. A moment's uncertainty seemed to assail his heart—as to what it was really right to do.

Then his firmness came back to him, and he had quite made up his mind.

A line of action seemed dictated. He could see but one course that he seemed meant to follow.

A single sacrifice of his whole self-interest in the matter seemed required of him. And surely—Jeanie knew it! Tacitly she surely went with him, and judged along with him, in the course he was resolved to take.

He said not one other word save “Ye needna call Angus Scott or Bob Carr; I’ll gae alang wi’ ye, Mister Davidson, at yer will.”

And he was gone—the two passing from the room, as Jeanie sat rocking herself on her low stool, with her apron thrown across her head.

And she was alone in the flickering firelight before she had fully realised what had happened. Who had intervened between Donnie and his smoking porridge, and what menacing and irresistible power had come in between them at their humble hearth there, and plucked her brave laddie away!



CHAPTER XIV.

POOR DONNIE.

THE “*aividence*” was strong and indisputable, and by noon next day Donnie stood accused before the Sheriff, in the Court on the Castle Hill, of the theft of Bailie Mactavish’s purse from his coat-tail pockets on the day of the Feeing Market, on the bridge.

And although when the news rang through the town everybody exclaimed, that “he’d aisy clear himsel’,” it appeared, indeed, that Donnie had little to say.

Some said he was stupefied when they brought him into the round Court-house and set him down there between the two policemen, opposite Sheriff Riach in his great white wig.

And no one person of the number who crowded in that day to the Court-house felt for a moment, within their hearts, that there was “theft or lie”

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written upon that brave, bright countenance, raised beneath its shock of brown wavy hair, between the broad, blue-clad shoulders of the two policemen—Angus Scott and Robert Carr—neither of whom looked as if he liked his position, and who were both quite convinced of the lad's innocence, in spite of all appearance of guilt. But what could be done? Donnie would say nothing, good or bad, upon the matter.

There he sat, a tall slip of a fellow—sometimes bending his head as they talked at him and harangued him; sometimes looking upwards, with frank, expressive eyes, to meet the Sheriff's keen questioning gaze upon his face; but all the while answering nothing to their investigations but—“’Deed and I dinna ken, sir,—’deed and I canna say.”

Where Rob was, it was true, he knew no more than any of them—for Rob had not appeared again upon the Little Green.

Who had stood next to Bailie Mactavish, Rob the gipsy, or himself, in the starlight upon the bridge—Donnie did not choose to tell.

And how the purse had come into his pocket—if, as he asserted, he had himself not put it there—was a subject on which the lad refused to give them any sort of view at all.

Therefore nothing could they do, after questioning, and cross-examining, and exhorting, but remand him for regular trial in a fortnight hence. They committed him to be kept shut up in the big prison on the hill-top, while inquiries and further investigation of the whole matter was made.

For indeed none thought that Jeanie Nairn's laddie had done that deed. And all suspicions pointed to the gipsy lad, who had gone about through the market along with him; and everybody was excited (when Donnie was fairly shut up in prison) to discover Rob.

But Rob was to be found nowhere. When, the very next day after the market, the police made their way to the Darroch, there was not a trace remaining of the gipsy camp!

They had conveyed themselves off through the night before—and in what direction, who could tell?

They had evinced, as usual, such a marvellous

faculty of taking themselves off into space, and of vanishing into thin air, that there was not much good thinking about them, or going after them at all.

There were so many roads which they might have taken—so many ways by which they might have gone. And in the short days of this dark November-time, to follow the gipsy camp into the heights among the hills, or along the southward wending roads, was an undertaking involving greater enterprise than either Angus Scott or Robert Carr felt inclined to embark upon.

And after all, who knew—even if they caught the gipsies—whether they might find any trace of Bailie Mactavish's money? Who could tell? It was scarcely worth the search as long as here, at least, they had Donnie Raffie, safe in jail, to answer for it, and the very purse itself had been discovered stowed away in his jacket-pocket.

So the investigations were not conducted very far, when all was told. And all that dreary and terrible time Donnie stayed in prison.

Every one was very kind to him. He was not put into very dreary quarters; but into a bright

little room near the porter's entrance to the big courtyard—and not by any means into a convict's cell.

For they were all sorry for the lad. The very warders of the jail felt sure that he was wrongly accused. And all hoped that before the fortnight was over—at the end of which he would stand his second examination by the Sheriff before committal for regular trial by jury, before the judges from Edinburgh at the next “Court,” in the spring—all hoped that something would be found out before then, which would establish his innocence and shift the crime on to more likely shoulders than his own.

But no—Donnie continued to bear it. And as the fortnight sped on, nothing special transpired.



CHAPTER XV.

DETERMINED.

IT was a dreary time he had of it, poor fellow, notwithstanding the gentle treatment of all around him, during these waiting days.

For one after another of his old friends, and of people high in authority and influence, too, about the town, came to visit and to talk with him—to exhort him to confession, and to strive to extract statements from his lips.

And it was difficult to resist them all, and to find answers to their pleading with him. And yet he was resolved, and he kept true to his resolve, and no word of accusation of any one could be wrung from him during those bitter days.

But how terribly the lad suffered !

Only he himself could ever know that; and only Jeanie could with any truth conceive it, as she sat and mourned him before her smouldering fire.

She went no more to the mill for that fortnight. For the shame that had fallen on her bright Donnie rested too darkly, and too heavily also, upon herself.

She could not face it, although she knew well for whom he suffered and why his lips were sealed.

"He didna do't," she murmured often to herself. "The Lord kens weel that the laddie didna put his hand upon the Bailie's money, nor put forth his finger to touch his coat; and the Lord 'll clear him'in His ain gude time. For, eh—I ken weel the truth o't—the lad 'll no blame his ain fayther's people, and his kith and kin. Oh, may the Lord Himsel' gie help to him, for it's a sair burden for the lad to bear."

"I didna do it, Jeanie," said the boy himself to her, when at length, as the fortnight drew near its close, they let her come in to visit him, hoping

that she might extract some fresh evidence from him indeed.

"I ken weel that ye didna, my laddie," was her answer. And then, as the warder stayed with them and heard all his remarks to her, they said little more.

And Jeanie left, sadly enough indeed, because her lad was pale, and had a stricken look in his young face, and because she felt she could be little help to him in the trying days to come.

"Where was the money?"—that was what everybody said. And the eye of suspicion began to rest, as people repeated this, even upon Jeanie herself.

Where was the money? The poor Bailie was not one whit the better for all the fuss and the talk, and for the shutting up of Donnie, as, in the purse which they took from the laddie's pocket there was not one single sou.

Where was the money? That, neither Donnie, nor Jeanie, nor, indeed, all the wise heads of the town put together, could determine—although all conjectured and formed their particular views.

Donnie must suffer for it, at all events, unless he would give evidence to help to prove that the guilt lay, not at his own door, but at his friend's.

In vain did they exhort. The boy had got fast hold of his own view of right and self-sacrifice—of the loyalty due by him to his father's clan—and even his love and his concern for Jeanie could not turn him from his purpose now.

So he sat there during the fortnight of short November days, and during the long darkness of the evening and the night,—often doing nothing. Often lying stretched in black darkness upon his narrow pallet, thinking over bright old days, and weaving strange old dreams of past and future, with that rambling imagination of his which had always been so vivid and so strange.

As the bright stars came out in the skies of a dark night, and he caught sight of them shining through the bit of window just opposite his bed, he would spring up, were it late or early, and scramble somehow to the window-sill, and peer out—away down the slope of the steep Castle Hill, over which

his lattice looked, down to the great rushing river, whose deep sombre reflections he could see in the dim starlight, even from here.

And his gaze would travel away over the roofs of the houses towards the Little Green, and away beyond this to where, far above the dark bend of the river—above the Islands and the Bught—rose the crest of Mealfourvie piercing the star-lit sky, with the outline of many other hills, encircling and closing in the soft valley, and carrying his eyes and his thoughts away to worlds beyond their heights and their boundaries, and his dreams into realms unknown.

And then, on a bright morning, as the sun broke out and gleamed over the town, amid the curling river fogs of the November days, he would watch the bright shaft of light shoot across his little room and glint upon the white walls and uncarpeted floor. And away his thoughts would roam to bright hours and long bygone autumns, when he had wandered up the river's bank, had seen the autumn sunshine glisten upon the wet branches and fall-

ing leaves of the beechwood, and had felt the fresh crisp breath of coming winter brush upon his cheeks and make them glow with new vigour and health.

He longed very bitterly, as he sat there in his little narrow room, to be away in those woodland worlds.

And truly his soul sank within him as he realised that he might never, indeed, be a boy, free among their glories and their wild grandeurs again.

Alas! if they tried and convicted him—if they condemned him to penal servitude, or to imprisonment for a long term of years—never would he wander among these woods and hills again with the fresh joy of youth, and the pride of unsullied honesty in his heart.

He would be condemned to life-long disgrace. For even if they ever freed him in that far-away future of years, which seemed so distant and so impossible to realise, he would be disgraced.

He would never tread the old free joyous paths

again. He would be an exile—a life-long, weary exile from the Green.

Strange phases of thought possessed the boy in succession, as he lived through these days—thoughts following each other, and new feelings springing up into being upon each visit of some different leading personage of the town.

And it was gradually, after one of these visits of exhortation, and in consequence of many arguments heard, that the realisation came clearly to him of the share in his deep disgrace borne by Jeanie.

“She that has nurtured ye,” said old Sandy Davidson, in winding up a long interview one afternoon; “she that took ye, when yer fayther deserted ye, and yer mither was laid low in the Chapel-yerd!—hae ye nae thocht for her, laddie, that ye winna gie yer tongue the freedom to spak out the truth?”

“Indeed, and I am sorry for my Jeanie,” said Donnie sadly to this; “but she kens weel, Mister Davidson, that I didna tak’ the Bailie’s purse.”

"But what's the gude o' a' she kens, if the aividence turns agin ye, laddie? And ye winna say a word yersel' that could put the lawyer on anither scent. Eh, Donnie, ye ken as weel as possible who was it thieved the Bailie's pouch, but if ye winna oot and spak truth to the Sheriff, laddie, ye'll hae to bear the brunt o' it all—and Jeanie Nairn, puir woman, wi' ye. For if ye're convickit, there's na doot aboot it, Donall, the eye o' suspeecion will rest from henceforth upon her. For whaur is the money, laddie, whaur is the money? If ye winna help us to find the Bailie's money, what are we to do?"

"Jeanie weel kens I didna tak' it," said Donnie.

"And what gude, ye doighted laddie, will it do to her to ken weel enough in her ain jidgment and conscience that ye didna tak' it—if she's to bide and see ye condemned to a feelon's cell, and sent to penal service, wi' yer head cropped and the banns o' the law upon your name for all yer life to come? Eh, laddie, canna ye spare the convection to her whativer? Canna ye save

yersel' the trial day, if no for yer ain sake, for Jeanie Nairn's? Eh, man, hae ye gien a richt thocht to the matter? If *ye* stand, Donall Raffe, a condemned thief before the Sheriff on Tuesday next, in the round Court-house, neither yersel', nor Jeanie neither, can iver hold a prood head in the licht o' day amang dacent folk, or honest-going people, no more. Winna ye think o' that, Donall, and spare Jeanie, whativer, the trial day?"

And Donnie did think of it, and sore puzzled was his young mind between contending aspects of right and wrong. Between his concern for Jeanie; to whom, it now became apparent to him, his own conviction would, for all the future before her, be an unfailing ill. The knowledge of his presence within the disgraceful jail, working in penal bondage, a name remembered with ignominy as one who had been tried, convicted, and condemned within the Sheriff's Court.

Poor Jeanie! The thought was very terrible to him. How kind, how true, how devoted through all his boyhood, had she been to him. Almost, for

Jeanie's sake, he wavered ; but yet—again—that first adopted standard of self-denying loyalty, which he did not call by any high-sounding or poetic names within his heart, but which he recognised just dimly, but quite sufficiently—recognised with a fervour that was really chivalry, though he did not know the word. Loyalty as he understood it—it kindled and animated still his pained and throbbing heart.

And his old love for Rob—that ardent devotion of a first friendship, that sweetness lingering over the memory of those early autumn weeks, which seemed so distant, and were really only such a little while ago—when he had first found the gipsies out in the Darroch, and they had recognised and claimed him as one of themselves—inviting him to make part in their joyous wandering life ! How perfect it had all seemed to him !

And how he had admired Rob. How noble, and how bright and brave, had the young fellow seemed to him, with his eager young strength, and bold vigorous ways, and stalwart graceful

form, and black flashing eyes, and odd foreign kind of ways that were all new and fascinating to Donnie.

How happy he had been with them for these first bright, unsuspecting days. What a memory they had left of boyish day-dreams and romance.

Probably it was the bright memory of these happy days which animated the truly quixotic chivalry of his actions now.

He had been devoted to Rob, and he had a strange deep delight in thus showing, or, as it were, living out his devotion.

He had, too, a silent romantic interest in the memory of his unknown father. These people, he thought, were his own belongings—for they were his father's people, and in his father's wandering life these had been his only friends. Surely he must be ready to suffer for them, if not for their own, then for his father's sake. "Greater love has no man than this"—came the words back again and again to his mind with a vague recollection. And, indeed, in giving honour, in giving freedom,

in giving everything that made youth and strength, and all the beautiful wild world of nature, precious to him—surely he was ready to “give his life for his friend.”



CHAPTER XVI.

ESCAPE.

BUT the feeling of compunction for Jeanie's sake grew strong within Donnie's heart. And especially the idea took fast hold, which old Sandy had impressed upon him, that that coming trial day—with its inevitable conviction and committal to further trial and deeper condemnation and disgrace—would be a dishonour and a shame for Jeanie as well as for himself; and a day, from the dark stain of which she would never recover.

And the single thought came strongly to possess him—whether he could not save her, at least, from that day.

The thought came so forcibly over him every night—as he clambered, when the stars appeared, up the wall to his little window-sill, piling chair upon washing-stand, and box upon chair, until he reached

his point; as he sat curled up, in the darkness and silence, perched up near the ceiling of his room; and as he peered through his window, which was small indeed, but had neither bar nor rail, the thought came—could he spare Jeanie? And save Robin too?

The trial day was to be the disgrace completely fatal, so old Sandy Davidson had said. Could he save her that, at least? And might he not do it—not for his own sake, but for hers?

The day drew near, and the very afternoon before, the jailer, who brought his broth and his supper, and who often lingered to exchange with the poor laddie a few cheering words, brought him the *Inverness Courier*, that he might have the satisfaction of therein reading the report of his own threatened disgrace: the account of the Feeing Market, of the Bailie's walk upon the bridge; of the two boys seen by Sandy Davidson; of the theft and the arrest. And the jailer left it with him, being called away on business at the time.

And Donnie read it all, and his heart burnt within him. It seemed all fearfully real, and all quite

insupportably horrible, now he read it in clear print.

His own name, with the words "arrest," "theft," and "police-station" attached to it; with the statement of the investigation being carried forward, and of the Sheriff's second examination that was still to come, before committal for trial by jury.

And the shame of the whole thing rushed hotly over the boy, and he bent his head and gave way, almost for the first time, to bitter tears.

The history of his own young life and parentage were there printed also, as a matter of public interest for the moment, he being the chief criminal case for trial at that time in the town. And the whole story was given, of his being brought long years ago, on a stormy night, by his dying mother, to the little cot by the corner of the washing-green; and of the devotion and self-sacrifice with which the brave mill-girl, in the midst of her own poverty and hard struggle with life, had sheltered and provided for her cousin's child.

And here he was—to stand trial for name and honour, accused as a thief, or at least the accom-

plice of thieves, and to be condemned as a felon, if he were convicted—bearing the burden of accusation alone.

The *Inverness Courier* gave a column, indeed, to his tale. “Inherent youthful depravity” was the heading of the article, and, indeed, by all appearances, it seemed clearly proved. And although Donnie scarcely got so far as understanding the terms they applied to him, it seemed evident enough, to the writer at least, that he was not only the culprit who had robbed worthy Bailie Mactavish, but that, by the facts of his descent and his father’s belongings, it was a matter of interesting but unquestionable probability, that he was in character, and would be in history, a notable thief.

Next day would prove it, at all events; and next day was drawing hourly nearer, and Donnie felt that nothing but a breaking with his deepest resolution and strongest instincts of loyalty and right could alter the verdict or avert the doom.

Miserable and heart-broken, he sat over that paper until his eye lit upon something else.

It was not local news. It was the brilliant record

of other histories far distant and far other than his.

The news from the war—from the far-away army of England's bold and brave before Sebastopol. The account was all written there of Inkermann, with its ring of glory—of Alma, too recent to be forgotten yet.

And Donnie lost all memory of himself for one quick passing hour, as he sat, with crimson cheek and flashing eyes, absorbed—as the record of deeds of gallantry and acts of prowess beyond his grandest dreams were conned, one by one, in the glorious chronicle of his fellow-countrymen in that far-off land.

How intensely he enjoyed it, sitting on his low straw mattress in his little darkening room! How old days and brilliant tales told by the Black Soldier in summer sunsets by the river-side came rushing back to him! And how his blood stirred within him with that deep kindling military ardour—which the Black Soldier, with much pride and hope, had seen glitter many a time in the boy's eager eyes!

He had forgotten all this in the valley of shame and bitterness, but it came quickly back to him now.

And with it came the thought of the Feeing Market day, just one short fortnight since ; and of the hour before he and Rob had passed down on to the bridge together. When, in the darkened street, amongst the crowd, they had stood, just at the foot of the narrow Castle Wynd ; and there, before a brightly lit-up whisky-shop, had been the well-known form of the recruiting sergeant. With his cheery voice he had been shouting about this distant Crimean War ; about the steamboat that was to sail in a fortnight—to sail to-morrow, indeed—and which would be far on its voyage by the time he stood, crest-fallen and disgraced, before small and great of his fellow-townsmen, in the felon's dock.

The recruiting sergeant's words came all back to him with a new burning vitality and force. How gay and cheery had the man looked, with his ribbons flying from his smart cap ; his tall figure clad in his trim red jacket, and his shoulders so broad and strong.

Many a time Donnie had listened to his voice ; and his challenge to all brave men to serve their country, and his welcome for small and great into Her Majesty's valiant fighting ranks, came ringing back now in Donnie's ears, and he sighed as he glanced restlessly round his white prison walls.

That same evening came good Mr. Maclaren for one more remonstrance against the lad's obstinacy and silence ; indeed, to win confession from him, if it must be in truth confession—and Mr. Maclaren had his own misgivings on the case.

Mr. Maclaren had never approved of Donnie ; or at least, if he had liked the brave laddie for himself, he had never approved of his care and expense lying at Jeanie's door. And he had been wont to prophesy evil concerning him ; and so, in spite of himself, he experienced some pardonable complacency that his prophecy appeared true.

So may be there was a certain acrimony in his special exhortations to Donnie. And to-night, besides all else he had driven home upon the lad, he added this upon the top: he told him how he himself had warned Jeanie Nairn against the folly of harbour-

ing a vagrant boy at her decent fireside, and had foretold that she would repent in sorrow having sheltered her wild cousin's bairn.

"And it would be weel indeed for Jeanie Nairn the day, Donall Raffie, that she had heeded my words. For if she'd left ye, laddie, to go to the House o' Vagrancy, and be weel keepit and weel skelpit in yer early years, who kens but ye might hae come to repentance when ye were young and yer conscience green and tender within yer hairt. And so ye might never have come to be the hardened and inscrutable lad ye stand now before the law itself and a' the majesty of the court and Sheriff,—and it might be weel wi' Jeanie Nairn herself the day."

"It wad be better for Jeanie that she'd never seen my face," said Donnie with infinite pathos.

"It would be that, indeed," said the worthy minister; "for better a lanely hearth, my lad, than young lives that will come at last to disgrace us, growing up around our ain fireside. And that is truth, indeed, Donall Raffie;—ye brocht a sair humility upon Jeanie Nairn."

"And she'd be better, I ween," said the lad dreamily, "if she never saw my face agen, nor heard my voice, nor yet my name. It wad be better for Jeanie that I wasna in the world anyway before to-morrow's rising o' the sun."

"Jeanie Nairn must tak' the Lord's judgment upon her ain doings, and upon your misdeeds the now, my lad," said Mr. Maclaren. "But it would be weel indeed for her, puir lassie, if ye had never crossed her door."

"I'll never cross it mair, wha'tiver, I'm thinkin'," said the lad sorrowfully; and then Mr. Maclaren left him and went away.

He had borne many things and very much at the hands of judgment and justice, this poor proud-hearted lad. At last, all seemed too much for him.

He could bear no more.

And when next morning the friendly jailer, bringing his breakfast, opened his door—the window, high up near the ceiling, so small and narrow that it seemed as if scarcely a kitten could creep through it; and so high above the green slopes of the Castle

Hill that it looked impossible for any human being to drop safely from it to the ground—the little narrow window was smashed to atoms—and Donald Raffe was gone !



CHAPTER XVII.

MORNING AT "THE SHORE."

NOTHING more was heard of him.

That morning Jeanie came out as usual to her cottage door about sunrise.

It was nearly eight o'clock. She looked up the steep slopes of the Castle Hill, and her eyes sought wistfully, as they always did, the little spot in the red sandstone wall which she knew to be Donnie's window; and she wrung her hands and deeply sighed, for she knew what was to happen to-day—Donnie's second examination before the Sheriff, and his probable committal for trial next time the judges came. And she knew Donnie had nothing to say in his self-defence.

What a bright sweet morning it was, as she came out on the low doorstep with so sad a heart!

Beautiful golden lights from the rising sun were creeping down the hill-slopes, and great broad gleams were falling across the river—chasing the dark shadows of the night.

All the houses along Ness Bank and the little mansions on the terrace above, and all the windows of the Castle too, glistened in that golden lustre of the morning, and seemed to call to her to be glad and thankful, in spite of that heavy grief within.

"His coming like the morn shall be,
Like morning songs His voice,"

murmured Jeanie to herself. "Na, na, I winna gie heed to a doubt about it. The Lord has no forgotten us—neither the laddie nor me. He will come yet, like the morning over the darkness o' the way, and He'll mak' it licht about us yet, though a' is sae fearsome now. Eh, but one wad think that the very Sheriff himsel' wad hae a saft hairt the day for my Donall."

She went in a moment to busy herself with her little domestic concerns. She lit up a bit of fire; for the morning was sharp and cold, and she must boil her kettle. And though she had no heart for

breakfast, she thought she would make herself a cup of tea.

She took her bright tin flagon, and went down across the Green to the river, and plunged it into the rushing stream. Standing just where Donnie had stood, or sat curled up, so often—watching the women stamping the clothes white in bygone summer days.

Then she went silently back across the Green again—walking with a weary step, very unlike her usual self, between the tall white posts and under the washerwomen's lines, and carrying her proud head bent, as if the crown of her honour and independence were indeed sadly fallen from off her smooth fair brow.

Her laddie was in sore shame and trouble, in the hill jail up yonder, and the honour of her humble home was dragged low in the mire. Jeanie felt as if she could not rise beneath the blow in any way this morning, and she shrank from each word of greeting, as she passed across the washing-green.

She made her cup of tea, and as she slowly drank

it, sitting by her little peat fire, she thought over the day's prospect. Donnie would be called into the court, she fancied, about eleven o'clock.

She could not go to the mill while it all went on—his trial, with its shameful ending, up there on the hill.

She could not go her way, as usual, out there by the river-side, nor could she work through her day of monotonous labour, thinking always so bitterly and so painfully of him.

She could not go; and yet—she ought to go. For only last night had come an intimation from the overseer that it was time she took her place again among them—and she must not forfeit that place!

Her line of life lay clear and unchangeable before her—lying over a dreary and monotonous country indeed. Work—and henceforth a lonely work. For no bonnie sunburnt face would be here to meet her as she came home. In the time to come no Donnie would be at the hearth-side, where, late and early, for the last twelve years, she had had him there.

And no bright fair schemes need be built up

now for Donnie's future, for all her worst latent fears for him had been rapidly fulfilled. And that future lay in hopeless ruin indeed.

Yet must she work for him—and not less for him than for herself. To one certain point, if life and strength were spared her, she would work in the coming time. She must clear her own name, and make a new starting-ground for his.

She would pay the money. She would strive, and work, and suffer, and want; and be hungry and weary, but undaunted—through months and years of labour to come—until she had saved up the sum out of her hard-won earnings, that had been abstracted by somebody from Bailie Mactavish's purse.

This resolve had soon come to Jeanie, and once made, she was prepared to work it out from the very morrow.

But to-day she must spare herself—she must have these few hours longer of rest and quiet.

But the overseer's message must not remain unanswered.

Down below the Merkinch, near the borders of

the sea, there lived a friend of Jeanie's—a woman who, like her, had worked many a long year at the mill. And she, Jeanie knew, would be at home to-day till nearly ten o'clock, for she had looked in on her way back only the evening before. And she had said that her mother was ill, and that she had got leave to stay with her until after the breakfast stopping-hour.

She would not have left her little house then, down there by the shore, until nearly ten o'clock.

The thought struck Jeanie that by this friend she would send a message. And as Mr. Thorne the overseer was not a hard man, she thought he would not take it ill if she asked "to bide at hame, jist a day yet," till she heard the fate of her boy. The following morning, by six o'clock, she would be back at her place again.

So Jeanie set out, walking quickly along the river-side towards the lower end; walking with that sad, self-contained, reserved look upon her face, which had come more and more over it since Donnie's arrest; walking with quick firm footsteps, her tartan plaid gathered neatly about her

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shoulders, and her brown head uncovered, the wavy hair glistening softly in the morning sunlight, and a quiet concentrated expression in her clear blue eyes.

Down the river-bank she went, until she had passed the old wooden bridge, and reached a knot of poor and very small houses lying along the margin of the shore. A bare stretch of unsightly land lay round the river's mouth, where it flowed into the Firth. It was washed often by the high tides, and swept by the rush of the wintry waves, so nothing grew on it but short sea-moss and wild thyme; and the cluster of cottages along its margin was almost below the river level, and very poor and damp.

But there was a fine sea-view all round here, and the dark pine-crowned brow of the Ord of Kessock rose grandly in the prospect across the ferry; while away to the left the Firth washed the soft green district of the Aird, and the shores of the Black Isle—as it swept in a broad sheet of changeful light and shadow towards Beaully, where rose the hills of Strathglass and Strathconan, enclosing and circling in the view.

To the right, as Jeanie stood at her mill-friend's cottage door, a wide sea-view stretched far away, melting into the distant and silvery horizon, where, out beyond Fort George and Nairn and Cromarty, the Firth met and mingled with the waters of the Northern Sea.

In this direction turned Jeanie's gaze as she stood and paused before she entered the house; and across this wide sea-view her eyes, and her inmost thoughts too, wandered dreamily away.

It seemed to soothe her, the soft morning lustre, and the misty vagueness of the tranquil bosom of the distant sea; and she looked away, far beyond the familiar outlines of many well-known points and landmarks on the rugged coast—away towards the silvery line of the horizon, where the blue of the gently heaving waters mingled with the tender lustre of the rising day.

There something caught her gaze and arrested it, while carrying no fresh thought or suggestion, however, to her mind. It was a white fleecy cloud (for so at first it appeared to her) floating softly down the sky-line, and disappearing even as she gazed.

But it was not a cloud, and this she knew immediately. It was a column of white smoke curling from out the funnel of some steamer, which was now—even now, this very instant—disappearing beyond the horizon of the furthest view.

At that moment her friend opened the little door at her back, and the rough kindly voice aroused her from her reflections and her distant gaze.

“Eh, Jeanie Nairn, my wuman, is it you? And hae ye news o’ the puir laddie the morn?”

“Na, I hae nae news o’ Donally,” said Jeanie sadly; “but I ween I’ll hae news enough by noon. Will ye tell Mister Thorne frae me, Maggie, that I’ll e’en tak’ the day idle yet, if he’ll pleasure me so much as that. For I haena the hairt to go to work, lassie, till I hear what’s to come o’ my lad.”

“I weel belave ye,” said Maggie compassionately. “Eh, Jeanie, but it’s a sair brash ye hae gotten—as I ken weel.”

“Ay, it’s a sair stroke,” said Jeanie gravely. “But I’ll be at the mill to-morrow, Maggie,—will ye tell Mister Thorne?”

“Ay, I’ll do that, and he’ll be weel content.

Wull ye come ben the house, lassie? what for are ye speerin' over the sea?"

"Eh, it's winderful peaceable and bonnie," said Jeanie tenderly; "ye hae a lightsome glint o' heaven itsel' at yon gates o' silver, Maggie. Ye hae a bonnie lookout frae yer bit housie here. It's no near so confined as up the river on the Green."

"Na; I like the sicht o' the sea mysel'," said Maggie.

"It's winderful quaiet and bonnie. And what is yon cloud, think ye, Maggie?—see, awa' beyond the coast of Nairn."

"Oh, losh!" said Maggie eagerly, "but that'll be the big steamer that was lying so lang aff Fort George. I saw it gettin' up the steam last nicht, and now there's not a bit o't in sicht at all. Eh, but this was the very day that the brave sergeant (who was flyin' his ribbons in the toon at the Feeing Market) said they war gaein' off till the wars. Eh—and that'll just be them now. What a smoke they're makin' over the sea there! and what a pace they'll be gaein' alang!"

"Ay, ay, I weel belave it'll be them," said

Jeanie, rather absently now, but with eyes still resting on the silvery horizon, and on the cloud of disappearing smoke. "I weel belave it'll be them. And so, good morning, Meg; I must awa' up the toon till I see if I'll get news at the jail door. Ye'll no forget to spak to Mr. Thorne for me, and I'll be kindly obliged."

"I'll no forget," said Maggie cordially; and then Jeanie turned from the sea-shore again, and went on her way towards home.

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Jeanie had not to go so far as the jail door, however, before she got some news of her laddie!

Just at the bridge-end, as she went swiftly past it towards the Little Green, was old Sandy Davidson himself, boiling over with righteous wrath at the disappearance of his youthful prey.

"He's awa', woman! the youngy blaguard,—he's awa'. He's eskepped frae the vera jaws o' jidgment! Where is the lad, Jeanie Nairn? for na doot he's off wi' your conceevance. What hae ye done wi' the lad?"

What, indeed? What had Jeanie done with him? Nothing, as she asserted again and again.

But he was gone—sure enough! And Sheriff Riach sat on the bench of justice without the chance of giving judgment on that particular young delinquent on that day!



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LIGHT OF SHADOWY DAYS.

AFTER that came many months and many weary days for Jeanie.

First the long terrible winter—the hardest that had been known for many a year in the North. Through this she worked away, going backwards and forwards with all the other women through snow and drifts, and bitter biting frost, to the mill, and home again—Jeanie never slackening her work one day.

The peat fire burnt low and cold enough upon her hearthstone; and there was little put into the brown teapot or the huge swinging porridge-pot either. It was a hard time of battle and self-denying weariness for her; and withal, when she went

to and fro to her hard work, her heart was sore and weary within.

For no more was heard of Donnie, and against his name and hers lay the burden of a heavy shame. To and fro she went, and she worked almost in silence.

After the first burst of talk, and speculation, and wonder, the excitement of the story died away, and other things arose to occupy the public mind ; and people hastily forgot Donnie and his arrest and disappearance, as well as Jeanie and her loneliness and weight of work and shame.

People were kind, but just then she could scarcely bear their kindness. She knew and felt keenly the grim suspicion that lay behind their kindest words and deeds.

And in truth it looked bad enough for her, save for that high and unspotted character she had always borne.

The money was lost, and the empty purse had been in Donnie's pocket. And if Jeanie had not helped him, and if they knew nothing (either of them) of that shameful theft from the worthy Bailie

—how had Donnie found money to fly from the old town, wherever he had gone to now ?

It looked ill for Jeanie; but no one knew how heavy it lay upon her heart and conscience, how hard was the work she did, the privations which she bore, or the fierceness of her struggle to redeem her boy's lost honour and her own good name.

That was a terrible winter for her.

But nobly the brave-hearted woman won through it. God only knew what strength upheld her, or what gleams of simple faith and trustful patience visited with a heavenly lustre that little lonely home. None knew all; for she was quiet in her ways, and sheathed in that sort of gentle pride which can endure and do, but—can bear no pity. So that the neighbours, one and all, let her come and go, saying little about her trouble or of the lost boy.

Mr. Maclaren was very good to her, however. He came and sat by her peat fire again and again, and he always left her with kindly words and cordial promise of continued sympathy and help. But they always quarrelled.

For Mr. Maclaren believed Donnie guilty, or at least an accomplice in another's guilt. And although he threw no cloud of doubt or suspicion upon Jeanie herself in the matter, it made him invariably angry when she expressed her own firm faith in the unblemished honesty of her dear laddie, repudiating all pity or condolence on this score.

"How can ye call a laddie honest," Mr. Maclaren would say, "a laddie who stands conveected before the Sheriff's Court, my woman, o' havin' thieved Bailie Mactavish's pouch?"

"Donally didna thieve the Bailie's pouch, if ye please, sir," was all Jeanie could ever be got to reply.

"And who then took it?" Mr. Maclaren would ejaculate. "Who thieved the purse and put it into Donnie's pocket, if the lad didna tak' it himsel'?"

"I dinna ken, I'm sure, sir," Jeanie would make reply. And as this controversy usually closed their visit, the worthy pastor would leave her presence in wrath.

"Eh! but it's winderful," he would grumble to himself, "the stiffneckedness o' they mild-like, quaiet-faced weemen. I trow Jeanie Nairn could put the puir Bailie on the track o' his money, if so be that she'd speak truth about the two lads, and *cemplecate* thon wild lot o' blayguard Raffes. But she's as dumb as the ass o' Balaam before the Heavenly vee-sitation; and it's no a word, gude or ill, that the Bailie, dacent man, will hear o' his lost siller from her."

But Jeanie did her best for the Bailie, and that soon came unquestionably to view.

For even Mr. Maclaren himself was softened towards her feminine obstinacy, as she stood one chilly day of the early spring before him, with a roll of brown paper, containing silver and pence in her hand, and begged him to take it in her name to Mr. Mactavish's house.

"It's the half-quarter o' the ten poonds that they're puttin' on my Donall," she said. "And I hanna got the courage to face the Bailie wi't mysel'. Will ye tak' it, in yer kindness, doon the street for me,

Mr. Maclaren, and tell the Bailie that Jeanie Nairn is sair puttin' aboot for his loss and trouble? And if the Lord 'll spare her, hale and healthy, for the length o' twa twalvemonths frae the day o' the Feein' Mairket, that he'll get his ain agen."

"But, my woman! Jeanie! How are ye comin' by the puckle money now? My conscience!—ye didna surely save a' this handfu' o' siller through the dreich and dreary winter from your earnings at the mill?"

"I did that, Mr. Maclaren, sir; I did that itself. And I'll be haining more for the Bailie, and haining faster too once it's summer, for I'll no be needin' as much as a spark o' fire. So he will get his ain agen,—and will ye tell him, if ye plase, sir, to mak' his mind aisy, for he needna fear, nor be misdootin' Jeanie Nairn?"

"But, my lassie, my lassie! how iver can ye manage for yersel'?"

"I can manage," said Jeanie humbly. "And it doesna matter much, Mr. Maclaren, it doesna matter now, since it's *only* for mysel'!"

"Eh, Jeanie!" was all that Mr. Maclaren could find to say.

And so it went on, and before midsummer was over Jeanie was there with her hard-earned savings again.

How it had fared with her—all these summer and winter days—no one knew nor questioned. Quietly she went to and fro among them, working her lowly but valiant way.

Nothing more was heard of the gipsies. They did not appear in the Darroch, nor anywhere round the town, all that long bright summer.

And nothing was heard of Donnie; and Jeanie seemed to be left, indeed, desolate, to work off the stain that was left on her good name as best she might in the meantime, and then to live out, deserted and solitary, the rest of her hard and monotonous life.

Where indeed had he fled to? she often asked herself. And had he completely forgotten her? Caring nothing for the weight of sorrow and disgrace he had left on her weak woman's shoulders?

And having no memory of all her kindness and long devotion to him? Where had he gone? And how was it with him?

That vague, unknown world into which he had vanished, seemed to Jeanie very far away. There was no one to make inquiry beyond these rapid and fruitless researches of the police.

And it was not within the habits or knowledge of Jeanie's sphere to advertise her eager heart's inquiries after her boy, in the columns of the newspapers. Nor to take any of the steps taken in modern life now around us for the discovery of persons even in humble life who have disappeared and are mysteriously gone.

She did nothing—for there was nothing she could do.

She only worked, and waited, and trusted. Conned the old promises she had loved her whole life long, and thought of the lad as Rebecca may have thought of Jacob, away in distant lands, and as Jacob may have thought, and hoped, and trusted for Joseph sometimes, in spite of the cruel testimony

of the blood-stained coat. Thought of him, away, but in the Lord's keeping; wandering, but with the wanderer's Guide; astray and downfallen, perhaps—but not beyond the watching of a Father's eye.

“Remembered”—that she knew Donnie must be. For had she not often placed him—with all the fear and uncertainty with which she had ever contemplated the future of his young restless life—placed him in the Father's hand, for care and leading—feeling sure, in her own heart, that the Father would not forget the charge.

“‘It is well with the lad,’” she used to murmur again and again to herself, from out a deep fount of hidden confidence that came springing up and up within her, and that nothing, no force of misgiving, no fear for him, could prevail to quench.

“‘It is well with the lad.’”

And so, comforting her deepest self, she went onward—earning the debt to Bailie Mactavish gallantly, and denying herself all but her daily bread.

Often she found comfort too, in these days, in

wandering to the spots of that beautiful country, which Donnie had most dearly loved.

In the long summer evenings she would sit upon the General's Well, and watch the river rush quietly by; and hear the birds sing softly in the bushes around her; and feel the evening quietness fall over her tired soul. And then it was, at such hours, and in such still solitudes, that deep grand thoughts would come to her untaught mind, and her heart would stir within her, and she would feel a strong unutterable confidence, and a strange deep gladness which knew no form in speech.

She had thrown away her whole life—so some of them told her. Flung from her all the bright glad years of youth. She had refused all the sweetness of common life, such as women round her held life's sweetness to be.

All had been put away and laid down, as they said, for this wild vagrant boy—for the love of her dead cousin—for the pride of her humble name and house. And for the sake of what was all gone now—plucked from her and broken down.

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The pride, the family honour, and the sweet companionship of the young eager life, which had grown up beside her, and for which she had flung away her own. It was all gone.

Not that her own loss much mattered. So the thought—roughly moulded, perhaps—rose within her heart again and again. The worth of her own life, the wealth of her own heart's treasure, all the years and the labour of her own time on earth—it did not seem to matter much against the sweetness of that inner glow, against that hope which shone undimmed within her—the confidence that “all would at last be well.”

On she worked—on she went—in her patient and noble, if obscure, way.

And there was no more gallant heart, indeed, within the manly bosoms of our brave soldiers, who all through these terrible winters, and through the weariness of the summer heat, faced the dire countenance of war and hard suffering out yonder in the Crimea—there was no more gallant heart among them, than that which beat,

steady and brave, within Jeanie Nairn, the mill-girl's breast.

As she went to and fro along the river's bank throughout that weary time, and as she "thol'd the dule," as she herself said, of her fierce struggle, by facing poverty and cold and hunger many a time; and shrinking not before all that might be—before hardness in the present, and loneliness in years to come.

"'It is well with the lad,'" said the soft sweet voice within her faithful heart. "Work, and hope, and suffer, and trust through all, that—'it is well.'"



CHAPTER XIX.

REDEEMING HONOUR.

BY New Year's Day, in the midst of the second winter, Jeanie had saved the whole of the lost ten pounds.

One cold bleak morning, as the snow was drifting over the country, and the river was stormy and fierce, she appeared for the last of those especial visits at Mr. Maclaren's house in Telford Street, and gave the one-pound-ten into his charge.

"So now, sir," she said, "the ill that was put upon me and mine agin Bailie Mactavish is at an end, whatever, and the Bailie has got his ain agen. Will ye tak' the one-poon'-ten to him, Mister Maclaren, and then—wha kens—may be the Bailie will look over the mischance that befel him, and spak ill agin my Donall no more?"

"The Bailie, worthy man, is sayin' nothing gude or ill o' Donall, Jeanie," said Mr. Maclaren kindly; "and what he's sayin' is this, indeed—that he'll touch no anither bawbee o' your money, whativer. And I'm thinkin' ye may e'en tak the one-poon'-ten back along wi' ye to buy a wincey gown."

"Na, na," said Jeanie earnestly. "Will ye gie my service to the Bailie, if ye plase, Mister Maclaren, sir; and will ye say that if he'd plesure me and gie a balm to a sair hairt, that he'll tak' the one-poon'-ten, that I hae been haining this six months back and mair; and then think weel o' my laddie, and no spak an ill word o' him, that's far awa' in the Lord's hand and keeping—nor of my honest name? Eh, Mister Maclaren, will ye ask the Bailie to tak' the one-poon'-ten?"

"Aweel, aweel, prood and honest ye iver was, Jeanie Nairn, indeed. And it was a waesome day when the name o' Raffie came to darken yer ain or Elsie Fraser's door. But I'm thinkin' the Bailie, douce man, will tak' no measures any more agin Donnie, whativer, and the laddie can come safely

back again to the toon. Is he awa' wi' the Raffes, think ye, Jeanie?" added Mr. Maclaren shrewdly, thinking to catch her suddenly and un-awares.

"I canna say—I canna say, indeed," she answered sadly, in a tone that almost assured him that she knew as little as himself. "I canna say—but I sometimes fears it, for they had a winderfu' bewitchment for the lad. But he's a gude and honest lad, wheriver he is, and whativer be his company, Mister Maclaren, and that I'll belave whativer, should I see him never mair in this waesome world."

"I'm aye wind'ring and wind'ring, mysel', Jeanie. But he's wi' the Raffes, and nae doot aboot it; and where the Raffes may be, who indeed can tell?"

"Who indeed, sir! The Lord keep the lad—may he be far or near to me! And may He bring him to my knowledge in His ain gude time! But I'm afeerd, in my hairt whativer, that never mair agen will he come nigh this toon."

"But if he gets word that the money is paid, Jeanie, and that the Bailie will tak' no measures for the prosecution agin him now, and that the Sheriff himsel' will may be look over it. If the Bailie mak's peteetion on account o' yer ain winderful and perseestent honesty in getting the money a' togither agen? Eh, if we could chance upon the lad, and let him hear about it, then, may be, he'd come back to the town."

"Mister Maclaren, sir," said Jeanie, "my Donall was a prood laddie—though a douce and dacent lad to me. But he had a fire in his een, and a spark o' speerit about him, that couldna put up wi' a mis-call. And they've been sair miscallin' him this many a day, on the Green and a' down the toon; and the very *Courier* itself had the story o' him wrote down in it too. How can the laddie come back to the toon, or to my wee house on the Green, sir, when 'thief' is the name they'd be callin' efter him up and down the river-side?"

"Aweel, who kens, Jeanie? Maybe some day he will clear himself. And you're an honest, dacent

woman, whatever; and I'll tak' yer poond ten shillings doon to Bailie Mactavish this afternoon."

'So her duty to her lost laddie was co'
And once more Jeanie felt that, for t'
could sit down on these winter *DERER.*
and honest hearth.

And the story was sp^{oke}, and one night Jeanie
and over the Green, and wearie," from the mill.
the river's bank as well, ough rougher winds and
sual, and as she
her laddie's crime.

And people blamed Doon^{ie} more than before
at this, and censured bitterly the vagrant heartless
ingratitude of the lad, who had left her to bear the
brunt of his iniquity alone.

"But what's in *will* out!" they reiterated, "and
what more could ye expect from a Raffe?"

Thus Jeanie was not much consoled by public
opinion in those days, which merely lifted the suspi-
cion from her own shoulders to lay it heavier than
before on her absent boy.

So, more than ever, she drew into herself, and into

CHAPTER XX.

A WEARY WANDERER.

IT was a stormy January, and one night Jeanie came home, "wat and wearie," from the mill.

The walk had been through rougher winds and heavier sleet-pour than usual, and as she shut to the door of her little house against the driving hail-storm and the wild sweeping gusts, she murmured to herself, that it was "a fearsome nicht," and that the river would rise over the bank along the other side.

She shut her door, and in she turned towards her black and fireless hearth.

It was almost dark. Only a flickering ray came from the moonlight streaming through the thick blue glass of her window—flickering and changeful because of the clouds that swept heavily over the stormy sky.

A bright moonbeam flashed lustrous and silvery across the small white-washed room for an instant, however, as Jeanie turned. It was bright enough to illumine every corner with its fitful and lurid light.

It fell across the deal table, and the black mud floor. It glistened on the tin pot-covers against the wall on one side, and on the crockery plates and saucers ranged over the high dresser on the other. It showed clearly the long handles of the old white-faced clock, and as clearly it brought into view—a presence in the small moon-lit chamber, which Jeanie had not observed until she turned round from the door, but of which the vision now paralysed her with surprise and agitation.

She stood transfixed a moment by the closed door, and she gazed, immovable, across the room.

She trembled violently, and her heart seemed to throb and then stand still, as she gazed towards the wide-open chimney, where—in the big wooden chair, in which Jeanie's father had sat for many quiet happy years of her childhood—into which Elsie Fraser had sank down on that long ago

winter evening in the exhaustion of her long foot-travel and of the sickness which had wasted her strength—in that big old chair, where Donnie too had sat curled up over his lesson-book through many a bright fire-lit hour—she saw now, in the cold silvery moonlight, the figure of a tall lad, it might be of Donnie's years and size, leaning back against the high wooden wings of the old-fashioned chimney-corner chair, and evidently sound asleep.

No wonder Jeanie started! No wonder that it was with trembling and with faltering footsteps that she came forward across the room to gaze silently an instant in the tranquil moonlight upon the face of the sleeper.

No wonder, for who—nay, what—might it be?

Donnie! her Donnie! Her own brave winsome lad, crept back to her home and her fireside shelter again? Or his wraith, may be, a phantom, a delusive form, that might melt and fade away before her gaze, as she drew near?

Not that, at all events! The sleeper was material and substantial! But neither was he Donnie.

So, alas! she realised, as, in the shifting moonlight, she bent to look into the unconscious face.

Not Donnie, but — and Jeanie started, again, as she realised this — it was no other than Robin Raffe, asleep, and quite at home (as he was, at all times, ever ready to be); sound asleep by Jeanie's chimney-corner, evidently awaiting her return.

What was she to do? She drew back again, and, in the chill and solitude of the changeful moonlight, she shivered.

Robin Raffe! What he was, and what he had been to her and to Donnie, she knew. And how was she to harbour, or to receive, or to speak to him now?

But the thought sprang up immediately — who knows, she might have news of Donnie from him.

Obeying the impulse prompted by this recollection, Jeanie turned to the wooden dresser. And laying her hand on her candle and match-box, which in her tidy room were found easily in their accustomed spot, she lit the candle and turned towards the fire-place again.

Robin was still sleeping heavily, and was not roused, even by the sudden light.

And Jeanie paused before she disturbed him, and holding the candle in her hand, she came and stood beside him and looked down upon his face.

It was Rob, certainly—but as she now realised, he was an altered Rob from what she remembered him two years ago. He was terribly changed, indeed. The thick dark locks tumbling over the back of the high old chair; the regular features and dark olive colouring and whole aspect of the lad's figure and mien were unmistakable. It was *he* him, indeed. But the cheeks that had been so round and ruddy with their sunburnt and wild-berry colouring of health and vigour, were thin and sunken, and the whole dark face was intensely pale. He was wasted and worn looking; his clothes were ragged and poor, and across his forehead was a deep red scar, which told of riot or of accident, which had probably been the cause of all.

"The puir laddie," said Jeanie, ever compassionate despite all other feelings that surged up in her heart. "The puir laddie! Whativer has

come over him—that he should be sittin', wan and wearie, wi' that white wae face, at this time o' the evening, and at this season o' the year, up here in the North? What has come to Robin—and has he news to gie my hairt o' my ain Donall? Eh, but the lad must be cauld and wat and hungry too—I'll no brak his sleep—he's as quaiet and canty, now, as a wee bairn. I'll mak' up a bit fire and put on the kettle. Wha kens, when he'll rouse the now—he may sup a cup o' tea?"

And so musing—full of charitable and forgiving, self-forgetting concern, for this new wanderer and wayfarer who had found his way to her door—Jeanie turned and busied herself, lighting up the peat and logs, and soon a warm and cheerful blaze was kindled in the wide chimney, and chased the old moonlight and its eerie shadows from the little room.

She swung on the kettle, and she set out two of of her delf cups and saucers for tea. She fetched a pile of oaten bread. She prepared a clean and tidy table, befitting an especial evening and unlooked-for guest. And she had just completed all

her little arrangements, and drawn the striped cotton curtain across the window to exclude moonlight and storms, when Rob awoke.

He sat up with a start and a sudden exclamation, and then, seeing Jeanie all at once, and taking in at one swift glance the old familiar scene of the wee room, with its cosy fire and kindly hostess, and rows of neat household things upon the shelves and pegs; and meeting the white face of the old clock—which had, many a summer evening of two years ago, given the time and the warning to trudge homewards to the camp in the Darroch, to him, sitting with Donnie here—seeing all so familiar and so unchanged—Rob groaned aloud, turned away from Jeanie, and covered his face with his hands.



CHAPTER XXI.

WHO DID THE DEED.

JEANIE looked at Rob for an instant in wondering silence, and then she sat down opposite to him across the chimney, on Donnie's little wooden stool.

"Eh, Robin Raffel!" she said, in her soft long-drawn accents of surprise and inquiry. "And what has brocht ye this winter time to Inverness?"

"My own feet brought me," said Robin, in a broken voice. "My feet, and they're tired enough, I can tell you, of the tramp. They're tired, and blistered too, Jeanie, but I would not give no rest to them till they reached your door."

"And what has brocht ye here, Robin? And what tidings can ye gie my sair and broken hairt o' my bonnie Donall?"

"Don!" exclaimed Robin, with sudden excitement. "Where is he?"

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He glanced feverishly, and with a curious kindling fire in his eyes, round the little room.

"Is it here ye're seekin' him, lad? My Donnie, who was driven by the hard rod o' veesitation from my door? Eh, is it you that's seekin' Donnie, Robin, and can ye gie me nae tidin's o' him yer-sel'?"

"I! God help me! No!" exclaimed Rob in a tone of bitter pain. "I know nothing of Donnie. I have never heard of him, nor set eyes on him, since I left him in Tomnahurich Street—at the farthest west corner there—the day of the Feeing Market two years ago."

"And Donnie is no wi' the Raffes, then!" said Jeanie in a tone of mingled satisfaction and dismay.

"No Raffe has laid eyes on Don, I tell ye, since the day when I cut and ran from him myself."

"Eh! Aweel, aweel, then," said Jeanie, with a deep sigh, throwing her apron over her head, as she always did when overcome with strong emotion. "Then it is the Lord that kens, and the Lord that has got him. And I weel belave that I'll never see my bonnie Donall more!"

"O Jeanie!" exclaimed Rob again passionately. "Is Donnie lost? did he run away?"

"He's awa'," said Jeanie. "And the Lord be wi' him," she continued, rocking herself to and fro. "Eh, Robin Raffie, Robin Raffie, it's nae ill I'm wishin' ye; but it was an evil and a wearie day when my laddie first met in wi' ye, for sair trouble has fallen lower and lower upon us since. Eh, what for, couldna ye lave my puir laddie alane?"

"Why, indeed?" exclaimed Rob. "It was a bad day for him, Jeanie, when I came his way. O Jeanie! why don't you turn me from your door? Why don't you curse me and drive me off into the storm? For I liked that laddie as I never liked any human being before, and I was his worst enemy in all creation. I tell you I've had him here, lying on my black conscience, and haunting me night and daylight ever since. And that's what's brought me, Jeanie—I cannot get rid of the thoughts of Don."

"Aweel, aweel!" was all that Jeanie said in answer to this, from behind the striped calico apron she had thrown over her head. "Aweel, aweel!"

"And look you here, Jeanie," continued Rob with renewed energy, "I'm come here ready to do all that I can. I'll go to the Bailie's with you. I'll swear before Mr. Maclaren, or before the Sheriff himself, that it was I took the old chap's purse on the bridge that day, and that it was I put it into Don's pocket when I made off."

"May the Lord forgie ye," was all that Jeanie at that juncture replied.

"Will you forgive me, Jeanie? I've come to get your pardon, and to clear Donnie, if I found he had come to trouble on my account."

"Trouble enough!" murmured poor Jeanie. "The laddie couldna thole it when they put him in the *Courier*, whatever. Eh, Robin, ye sent us trouble enough!"

"Can I never make up for it?" he went on. "See, Jeanie, I am here to speak and swear for him. I bore it as long as I could. I didn't want to confess it; and I thought I had got off fine and clever and cheap. But I hadn't given the slip to the thought of it all, and so here I am. The money was soon spent. It didn't do much good, one way or the other,

to the camp, and then I was in desolation. I never had an easy hour. And last Dorking Fair, Jeanie, I fought with Will Neave, the big blacksmith, on the Green there, and got this ugly crash across the skull with his cursed iron. And there I was, knocked down, for nearly twenty weeks, lying in the grannie's hut there. And she raved of Donnie to me, and talked till you'd think she meant to drive me wild, although not knowing the worst that was on my mind. I thought many a time it was all up, and I never got the same again—never right nor well. But I got the strength to come this far, Jeanie, and here I am, ready and longing to clear Don's good name."

"Eh, the name—maybe we can wash it white as the snaw-drift, as it iver remained constant within my hairt. But, oh Robin, the laddie! If he's no wi' the Raffes—wi' nane o' ye—whaur can he be?"

Where, indeed? That was the question and the wonder that soon rang through the town.

Jeanie went along next morning after Rob's unexpected appearance to Mr. Maclaren, and told

him, at Rob's express wish and entreaty, the whole strange tale. And she told him, too, that Rob lay sick, and—she feared—dying, in Donnie's little attic at her house.

She had suddenly realised how weak and worn he was, as she had sat and heard his confession last night ; and she had sprang up and made him his cup of tea.

And then, when he would have risen to go out into the blustering storm to seek a bed and shelter somewhere for himself, she had seen how really ill he was—how he rose with difficulty, and had hardly strength, apparently, to walk across the floor ; and then she had said—

“ Eh, Robin Raffie, ye're o' Donall's ain kith and kin. Ye hae wrocht a sair ill to him. But ye hae come to a repentance, and ye're seekin' to mak' richt the now what ye hae put sae wrang. And so, Robin, I canna turn ye frae my door—ye that is o' my Donall's people, and a lad who, to his ill, he loved. And ye maun e'en gae up till his ain bit bed in the loft yonder. It'll be warmer and more dry, whaiver, than the wild winds and storms out-

side. Eh, Robin, in his name I gie ye meat and shelter, as I ken he would do himsel' if he were here—to hear yer tale to me, and—to forgive.”

And there Rob was lying in high fever now, brought down to the grave's brink by exposure to cold and drifting hail and snow, and by long tramps for many days together—he being scarcely yet recovered from his hurt.

There he lay; and Jeanie was resolved to take care of him, pouring forgiveness for herself, and for Donnie also, upon the half-conscious and fever-tossed head.

And Mr. Maclaren came to see him. And when he was a little better, the Sheriff also, and the Bailie, and old Sandy Davidson came. And they took down his “deposection;” and although some said there was “a paacity o' aividence,” no one could well question the passionately self-accusing assertions of the seemingly dying lad.

And Donnie was cleared—quite triumphantly cleared. And the *Courier* gave an article again to the account of Jeanie's honesty, and self-devotion, and of her kindly forgiveness of the wild vagrant

gipsy who had done her and her laddie so grievous a wrong.

And the neighbours smiled upon Jeanie again, as people are apt to smile, when the sun of life shines bright again, on one who has walked in shadow and in cloud.

But it was all of little use to Jeanie, for all the while—nothing was heard of the boy.



CHAPTER XXII.

A VICTORIA CROSS.

THE winter passed on while Rob still lay sick and helpless in Jeanie's cottage, and while people gossiped over the story he had come there to tell; over poor young Donald Raffe's unjust arrest and disappearance; over the prospect and faint hope that was now remaining that he would ever be heard of again.

Some thought the bold, proud-spirited fellow had made away with himself. Flung himself, in a passionate frenzy of despair, into the deep rushing river, near its mouth by the sea, on that starlight night when he had dropped over the high prison wall. Some thought one thing, some another; and it was again, for a little while—a tale of nine days' wonder in the town.

Then great public events, happening far away, came to absorb men's minds, with their distant rumours; and excitement for the glory of British arms in Russian combat waxed high.

And Sebastopol fell, and the two winters' siege, with all its bloodshed and its suffering, was at an end at length; and the nation looked to welcome her soldiers home.

And Mr. Maclaren—worthy Mr. Maclaren, who had a warm heart and a keen sympathy for his fellow-creatures near and far, although he used a rough tongue now and again to express it—took a great interest in these military triumphs, and read his papers with regularity during all this time.

And one morning he read of a grand exploit over his breakfast. And his warm eager heart beat high with enthusiasm, as he went on to read, that the young hero of this distinction was a Scotchman—a private in a Highland regiment, and, not much more than a year ago, a young recruit.

It was a tale of brilliant gallantry; and it was in the retreat of a skirmishing party after the storming

of the Redan—a small party, who had been sent out, under command of a non-commissioned officer, to spike an enemy's gun. The men were under orders to withdraw (the report ran), covering each other's retiring steps and aiding each other as best they might, under the hot fire of a battalion of Cossack artillery, who were mowing them like grass in summer to the ground. They were closely followed, having ventured, in their determination to spike the guns at which they pointed, far forward beyond the enemy's lines. And suddenly the sergeant, their leader, fell—shot dead, it appeared, by a Cossack bullet—and disorder spread for a moment through the little band.

“Retreat!” came the ringing and urgent cry from the second in command, as the Russians advanced close upon them, and in enormous force.

“Retreat”—the little party had done their work, had spiked the guns they had been sent to silence, and were of no fair number to fight. Retreat seemed now imperative, although they left their leader lying helpless on the field.

Helpless, indeed—with Russian shot flying thick in the air around him, and Cossack spears already raised to plunge into his wounded side.

Helpless, until suddenly—there sprang forward, halting in the retreat, and breaking from the line of retiring soldiers, this young private of the Highland Watch. He threw himself between the body of the wounded sergeant and the approaching Cossack spears, and alone, with his own young stalwart arm, he kept single-handed the first two or three of the advancing enemy at bay.

The example spread with electric impulse, and the whole of the brave little band turned also then. With the young Highland private still a little in the front of them, and he still shielding the sergeant's prostrate body from shot and spear, they held their ground, until a diversion occurred for their happy rescue—a troop of Cardigan's Light Cavalry coming sweeping up in time.

Flank and front, the Cossacks were attacked then, and after a few fiery moments they were driven back.

The English cavalry swept them along before them, and the little company of intrepid Highlanders, having nobly done their work, held their ground still firm and steady with their boy-leader at their head.

A moment, and they would have retreated in safety, but, alas! there came from the Cossacks a stray backward and parting shot. It reached the aim for which it was doubtless intended—it pierced that young figure standing by the wounded sergeant's side.

The lad fell, and when at length the ambulance reached the scene of the skirmish, the prostrate form of the sergeant in command of the little band, and the brave young fellow who had rescued him from the Cossack spear, were borne to the hospital side by side.

“This gallant deed was reported to-day from the camp of the brave Highland Watch,” continued the writer. “I’ve not yet heard the young private’s name. But we are all likely soon to hear it, both with you at home, and out amongst us here; for

these are the deeds for which the Victoria Cross has been created, and if spared to recover his wounds I shall not be surprised to see Her Majesty place one on this young Highlander's breast."

Mr. Maclaren was much "taken up," as he said, with this anecdote of gallantry—of which so many came in those stirring times from the far-off Crimea, to be read with thrills of enthusiasm by one and all of us at home.

And Mr. Maclaren made this special one a point in a lecture he gave that night—in which he managed to bring in the war, as it was brought in then to every theme. And he warmed to keen enthusiasm as he recited their young countryman's brave deed.

He told Jeanie Nairn of it, and Robin also, when he went to sit by that sick lad's bedside on the morrow,—and Jeanie brushed a tear away, as he enlarged on the aspect of the brave young Highlander standing to face the enemy—a stripling, as the papers said, of scarce nineteen years.

"About the age o' my Donnie," she said softly, as the minister finished his narration, and as she thought to herself that it was a deed Donnie would have readily done.

Mr. Maclaren was amazingly "taken up" about it—as he was, indeed, over each stirring incident from the wars.

And it had by no means faded from his mind, when, three weeks afterwards, a strange, foreign-looking letter, addressed in a handwriting he did not know, was brought to his door, and delivered there to his own surprise and to that of all who saw.

But if the outside of that official and important-looking epistle filled the worthy pastor with surprise, judge what his feelings may have been when he perused its contents!

It was dated from "Scutari. It was written in a manly and evidently gentleman like hand; and if the style was off-hand, it was expressive:—

"REVEREND SIR,"—it began,—“Excuse my in-

truding upon you. I do so on a subject in which I venture to hope that you have sufficient interest to gain me at least a hearing.

"I have here, lying wounded in the hospital, a young private of the Highland Watch, of the name of Donald Raffe. It is a name which is ringing with a sound of glory in it through the camp out here just now. And if it is a name with which you are familiar up in your northern town—let me tell you it is one of which you may be justly proud.

"Donald Raffe has won a V.C. for himself, and will go home, I hope, safe and sound one of these days, to wear it for the admiration of all the fair and brave. The story has been in all the papers, so I need not repeat it to you. There is not a home in the old country at this moment, I should hope, where the young hero of that famous skirmish is not a well-worn theme. Drink his health at your civic board of Inverness, I beg of you, for in that respect he needs all the good wishing of his friends. The lad is badly wounded and still very low. We have, however, every hope of him, and of gallant Ser-

geant Grey also, whom he rescued from the Cossack savages, and for whose life he has well-nigh given his own.

“Sergeant Grey is better, and has been able to tell me all about the lad Raffe. And on his story I write, as well as in obedience to a request the poor boy made me himself. I never tire of going down the wards to have a look at him, so proud am I that he should belong to my corps. And so I was not long in finding out, when he came to a bit, that he was far from happy and easy in his mind. And now the whole story has been told to me. And it seems strange to me that any of you up yonder, could have suspected such a lad as Donald Raffe. *Who* took the purse? I cannot pretend to tell you, for on that he was quite silent to me. But *he* did not take it—and of that I am sure. For a more honest and truthful lad never wore the uniform of the Old Watch, or better deserved the honours he has won. It was absurd to suspect Raffe—but it does not much matter, I fancy, now! I hope it is all forgotten, and that when he goes up

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to his native town you will receive him as he deserves. *He* did not do it,—I will go bail for that. But the lad is unhappy because ‘Jeanie’ does not know he is here. Who is Jeanie? I cannot tell you, but perhaps you will kindly find out. And then go and tell her that her laddie is safe with us. He joined the recruits just as the *Seraphim* got under way, last November twelvemonth, at Fort George, you know,—having walked (so he tells me) from the Castle Hill prison above Inverness through all the night. So we got him, and you lost him—perhaps for him and for us as well. As well for gallant Sergeant Grey, at all events, and for the honour of the Old Watch.

“The lad is safe,—so tell his ‘Jeanie,’ whoever that fair lady may be.—I am, reverend sir, your obedient servant,

“HENRY CASTLEROY,

“Captain of the Old Highland Watch.

“SCUTARI.”

It was a midsummer evening of the same eventful

year. And the *Defiance* coach from the South was due in Inverness about curfew-time.

It stopped always, in fact, about eight o'clock in front of the Caledonian Hotel, as the first peal of the chimes which had rang the people home, and sent the children to bed in the town and up the river-side for untold generations past, came echoing from the steeple of the old jail.

The *Defiance* was a little late, and to-night it was eagerly expected. There was quite a crowd of people gathered to see its arrival indeed ; and the large square of pavement in front of the hotel was covered with important members of the community, all waiting with curious interest the appearance of the mail.

There was Bailie Mactavish, looking canty and cheerful, as if he had quite recovered the shock of the Feeing Market day and the temporary loss of his ten pounds.

There was Sandy Davidson, looking eager, and leaning forward upon his gnarled oak stick as he waited, gazed up Church Street in silence, and listened for the distant echoes of the horses.

There was Mr. Maclaren too, and sundry others, with the Sheriff and the very Provost himself, waiting as if for some one unusual, in whom the town took an especial interest, and who was with this complimentary (though not exactly official reception) to be hailed among them.

Standing aside in a modest corner, and trying to stand unnoticed, was Jeanie Nairn. Clad in her best Sunday plaid, with her brown hair shining and smoothly braided, and with her hazel eyes full of kindling excitement, and tender with soft dewy lights.

And towards her, indeed, many of the assembled gentlemen—who were loitering there in the beautiful summer evening, waiting the arrival of the coach—had turned, with kindly greeting, and moreover with many a cordial shake of the hand.

All this had much abashed Jeanie, but she had had to put up with it, for they *would* make their kindly and congratulatory speeches to her! For indeed there was no one in the whole town of Inverness who would not have been glad to take Jeanie Nairn by the hand that day.

The town and all the country-side were proud of her and of Donnie Raffé as well.

Jeanie Nairn's wee laddie had recovered from his wound—and Sebastopol had fallen—and peace was proclaimed—and home had come the gallant Watch and all the other regiments, with their thinned ranks of warriors bold, with their honours and wounds and scars.

And there had been the grand parade in Hyde Park, of the heroes too, and then Captain Castleroy's expectations had been realised, and the Queen herself had fastened the Victoria Cross of honour and special glory upon the breast of the young Highland soldier, who had been so ready to fling his life away to save his friend—given it to Jeanie Nairn's laddie—to Donnie Raffé.

And the whole town, here at home, thrilled with joy and enthusiasm, that among the gallant few chosen to receive the special mark of glory and distinction which proclaimed him among Her Majesty's chosen and best, was one from amidst themselves—and one who, in the distinctive notice giving the

history and origin of each of these heroes of the Crimea, appeared as the son of a Scottish mother, and as coming from Inverness.

And Inverness was proud indeed of him, and all were sorry, now the whole truth of the lad's past history was known, that they had so sadly — although unwittingly and reluctantly — wronged him, when they had him with them here at home.

Now, all and sundry, small and great, were gathered together to receive him, and to make up by a cordial greeting of the young soldier for the trouble in the life of the boy.

Many a hearty word had been spoken to Jeanie, and many had rallied her on the grand distinction that had been won by Donnie in thus receiving the reward of his gallantry from the gracious hands of Her Majesty herself.

And many a time Jeanie had given a demure and modest answer, worded with a certain discreet but conscious pride, saying—

“Ay, ay, the Queen is sae kind as to be weel

plaised wi' my Donnie, and I'm sure I'm humbly obleeged to her indeed."

And Jeanie would curtsey with discreet reverence as if in the presence of Her Majesty, and look pleased and demurely satisfied, as if a quiet and delightful thrill of triumph possessed her, at the fact of her lad, who had been condemned by the Sheriff and court of justice here in his own place among them all, should have found favour in the eyes of the Queen herself, God bless her! who was no doubt so much more qualified to judge.

"Ay, ay, the Queen was weel plaised wi' Donnie!" There was no concealing the unquestionable triumph of that fact.

They had not long to wait; for soon came the gay ring of the old guard's horn, and clatter came the hoofs of the four horses over the rough pavement of the town.

And "Hurrah!" burst from corner to corner of the streets, as the coachman flourished his whip and gathered his reins up for a brilliant dash up to the

hotel door, and as the guard blew his long brass horn with vigorous enthusiasm again and again, and as every one discerned, instantly the coach came in sight, the bright bit of colour made on the crowded coach-top by two soldiers' red jackets, there side by side.

Two of them—two gallant home-comers from the thinned and mowed ranks of the brave.

One came really home—to all that ever had been home to him—the other, to the country that had been his forefathers' at least. One red coat was worn by a brown-cheeked, sunburnt, bright-faced young corporal of under twenty ; and the other, by a broad-shouldered colour-sergeant, whose bronzed and scarred countenance, and erect and most military mien, told of many a year's service in distant lands and foreign climes (while his young companion had been in his ragged kilt), and whose broad breast, indeed, was covered with glittering medals, won in many a hard campaign.

There was but one medal on the lad's red coat, however ; but that one—that small bronzed cross—was an honour excelling all the bright glitter of

every sort of earthly gem, and one which attracted the gaze and brightened the light in every eye that rested on it—or on the gallant young wearer with the scar upon his brow.

A moment and, amid bursts of greeting and shouts of enthusiasm that rang from side to side, the two had come down from the coach, and Jeanie's soft blue eyes were once more lighted up with love and faithful tenderness, as she met the kind cheery glances from the bright brown eyes of the boy.

There she had him again, tall and lithe and strong, with his handsome head held straight and high after so much drilling and soldiering, and his brown cheek glowing, spite wound and exposure, with the ruddy flush of health and complete happiness again.

And he brought his friend to her, Colour-Sergeant Grey, the best non-commissioned officer in the Highland Watch, whose father had gone out from Glen Urquhart fifty years ago with a recruiting party to join the regiment in India, and who had been born in the regiment, and had belonged to it all his

brave adventurous life—having never come to visit the Highlands, or to see the glen of his rural forefathers, before.

He had come with Donnie—accompanying him out of pure love to the bright bonnie lad, whom he had befriended and helped to go straight and true ever since he had come to them with that steamer-load from Fort George, and to whom now he clung as with the devotion of a father.

Since, the young fellow had repaid his kindness and care for him by flinging his life between the Sergeant's prostrate body and the Cossack spears.

Here was the Colour-Sergeant come, right up here home with Donnie, determined to see him safe once more in his Jeanie's home.

- For the boy had told him all about his childhood's days in the Vale of the Ness; of the wee housie by the Green Corner, and of the kind and faithful heart which had been his shelter and his haven, giving him all that he had lost in his mother's care and love.

And he had told Sergeant Grey all the story of

the Raffes—of his father's people—of the theft and the arrest—all the shame of the bitter, sorrowful tale. And his good friend had then said that he would come home with him and see the story to the very end.

He would like to see the end of the trouble, he said, which had cast such a slur upon the pride of the Highland Watch and thrown so deep a shadow over their young hero's days.

And he said, moreover, that he would like to keep an eye on Don, when he got among them all again, that he must be sure that there was no more mischief brewing, if any of the Raffes should chance to come about.

So here he had come, north with the boy; and Jeanie Nairn, the laddie's true and devoted foster-mother, stood now, looking softly up with a shy and quaint satisfaction, into the scarred and bronzed face and keen grey eyes of the noble-hearted soldier, who, in those far-away scenes of temptation and hardship, had been raised up to be a guardian and a father to her boy.

Together the three walked up the street, many kindly well-wishers trooping along with them. And many an admiring glance was cast by proud fellow-townspeople—by those who were patient workers by Jeanie's side in the wool-mills, and dwellers on the river-washed banks where the lad had been known and loved from the days of his winsome childhood.

Many an eye brightened as they went up the street, the three together—the gentle, modest-looking Jeanie, in her tartan plaid and with her smooth brown glinting hair, walking between her brave young soldier and his stalwart and grizzled friend.

Sergeant Grey was a very fine-looking fellow, and carried his head high as he strode through the town, and turned, with Jeanie and Donald, down Bridge Street towards their humble cottage domicile on the Little Green.

What an excitement there was when they reached there, and what a crowd round Jeanie's modest door!

Friends, old and young—Big Mary the fishwife,

who had taken Donnie trotting away beside her in old days, many and many a time, to the market below the town.

The Black Soldier, who had been one of the first to greet the lad, as if indeed a very son of his own—whispering (after many a cheery and ringing shout of triumphant congratulation) that the trouts were running in plenty up the Friar's Shot, and that he had a beauty of a fishing-rod all ready for his use at home.

And "Foolish Ally," and "Silly Peg," and all the dwellers, wise or "wanting" as they were called, upon the Green, gathered around Donnie, and wondered over him, and boasted of their ancient knowledge of him in days gone bye.

He received their greetings, gaily answering them with an up-springing brightness of intense joy in his heart.

And he looked round, as he stood among them in his red coat, on the doorstep at the corner of the Little Green, and he saw looming up above him the walls of the jail, and the Castle tower, and

the wee window, out of which he had squeezed himself that night, he scarce knew how.

And as he looked, a broad beautiful ray of golden light fell over the tower and the high wall and the green slope of the Castle Hill, and flooded all across the river, coming from the sunset glow behind Craig Phadrich and from the lustre of the western sky.

It all seemed to him glad and glorious and beautiful again, as it had been in that long ago in the sunlit eager days of his unconscious youth. And his heart stirred within him, with deep still unutterable joy—and he felt God had been good indeed, and that surely Jeanie's prayers had been as angels camping in guard around him.

For all had gone so well and brightly in that distant adventurous life of his. And here he was back again with her—cleared and honoured indeed in the sight of his fellow-townsmen—at home in the Little Green corner once more.

He broke away from the friendly group, however, presently.

Jeanie had whispered something to him in answer to a question he had put in a low tone to her.

"Ay, ay, go in," she had said. "He is in the wee low closet beyond the room. We brocht him down in the spring-time, and he's lyin' on yer own old bed there yet. Ay, ay, go in, my laddie. He is fearsome to see ye, but the licht o' yer bright bonnie face will be enough to mak' glad even *his* sorrowful hairt. Go in, and gie a hairtsome greetin' to puir Rob."

"Dinna say a word about it, Robin,—it's a' past and awa'."

And that was all Donnie would have said on the subject. Only—

"I'm thinkin'," he shortly added, "that I owe ye mair gratitude than grudge—who kens, Rob? If it hadna been for yon mischance that came over me, I might hae been sittin' on Archie Neil's tailor's board in the Black Vennel, stitchin' tweed breeks the day. Who kens? I was wild to be a sodger, but I hadna the hairt to brak awa' frae

Jeanie. And may be I'd be there in the Vennel the nicht, Rob, laddie, but for the chance that I met wi' through you. So na mair about it at all."

And that was all Donnie would have said, only he wrung Robin's hand in silent forgiveness and acknowledgment when the other, still bending his head and hiding his face upon his pillow, held out at last a hand to receive that pardoning grasp.

And then Rob Raffe looked up again, and took heart—from the bright light of youth and strength and eagerness which shone in Donnie's clear and truthful eyes. And as the young soldier sat there, giving his unspoken pardon in kind and compassionate gaze upon the other's face—and as the vagrant, desolate gipsy felt the kind warm clasp of his injured friend—the forgiveness seemed to reach and soften him, and to bring strange new lights of truth and joy, and of new-born hope and health and vigour, into his own dark soul.

And the dire contrast came, with stirring realisation to him, of the two past histories of himself and

of this gallant and true-hearted boy who was of his kith and kin.

“I will be an honest man, if God spares me to rise up again,” he exclaimed passionately at length; “for ye have been the new-making of me between you, within and without indeed! You, Donnie, you and Jeanie Nairn. I will be another man—and I’ll warrant you’ll have never cause to be ashamed of the presence of your gipsy cousin, Rob Raffe, again.”

And Rob kept his word.

New strength and vigour, and new returning power of life, seemed to come to him from that evening—and before the harvest was ripe upon the Leachkin he was well again.



CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

THERE is not one of this little group to be found at the washing-green corner at the present time.

The Green itself, indeed, is no longer there at all! And I do not know what would have happened to Jeanie Nairn if she had stayed to see the demolition of her little old cottage, and the disappearance of the Green where Donnie had pranked.

But long before it had given way to the modern splendour of cathedral and palace which adorn that corner by the river-side, Jeanie Nairn was far away in other and new scenes.

When the leave was up, and Sergeant Grey and his young charge Donnie had to join the Watch again, the Sergeant revealed a view of his own.

It would be much better for the lad, he said, to

have his mother Jeanie in the camp along with him, abroad or at home. And her fireside would be so dreary here when he was gone again. And he himself, gallant Colour-Sergeant Grey, had enough to offer, and stood high in his regiment, and might well venture upon a wife. Would Jeanie come and keep his barrack-room home cosy and bright for him, as she had done the wee housie by the riverside?

Would she venture out on the great wide unknown world in the company and protection of those two who now both loved her well?

And Jeanie went—for she was brave enough for that or anything—joining the Highland Watch on its way towards the scorching plains of the far East. And the journey even to India had no fears for her. For she went with her laddie, and “with that douce and dacent man, the Sergeant,” whom she now admired and adored indeed with as much heart as had been left by Donnie, and whom she was right pleased to join in his wandering and adventurous career, seeing they were to take care of their young hero together.

So off they all went when the recall came—Mr. Maclaren having right joyfully answered the summons to do his own part, so indispensable, on Jeanie's wedding-day upon the Green.

Away they went—and the gallant Watch has seen much service, and been in many a rough campaign and queer scorching Indian quarter, since then.

But it still cherishes the annals of the Crimea in its proud chronicles. And among all its brave ranks there are none who are held in higher honour still, than old Sergeant Grey and his Highland wife, whose tidy fireside and bonnie soft Scotch face and tartan plaid is the pride of the whole corps indeed, when the General inspects quarters, or when the wives of the regiment are assembled in the church.

And if there is one name better known than another for honesty and upright devotion to duty, and all the calls of military life; or one pair of fellows who "are sure to do well," as the Colonel says often with satisfaction, it is the two cousins Raffe.

Donald, who is high up among the non-commissioned officers, with many stripes on his scarlet sleeve by this time.

And Rob, who enlisted also, when the whole party left the Little Green, and went south together ; who came forward to fill (by one) the many sad vacancies in the thinned ranks of the Crimean men, and who, side by side with Donnie, and under the watchful care of Jeanie and of Sergeant Grey, did excellently well in a red coat—certain vagrant proclivities notwithstanding.

It would soon have been difficult to recognise him as the young vagabond who, loafing about the town and across the bridge that Friday of the Feeing Market so many years ago, had so nearly been the ruin of Jeanie Nairn's Wee Laddie—making the dark spot and the shadow of sadness which clouded so heavily at one point this simple story of the Old Town.

